

ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Spring 2014

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EARLY Childhood EDUCATION: A Special Opportunity for Congregations

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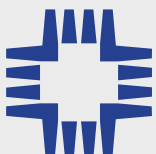
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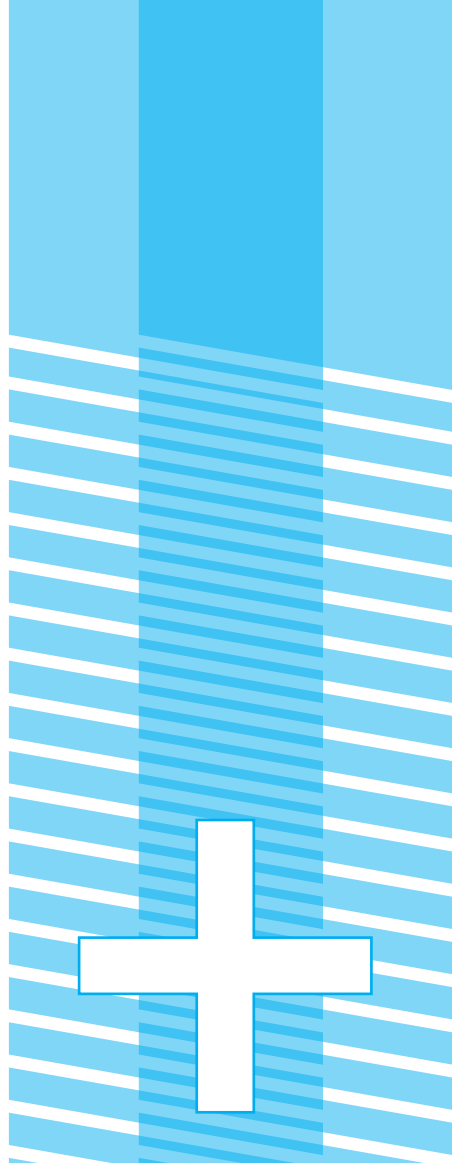
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When the Editorial Committee selected *Early Childhood Education: A Special Opportunity for Congregations* as the topic of this edition of *Issues*, our intent was “to highlight significant needs existing among younger children, the faith formation of younger children, an overview of what is happening in early childhood education (defined by some educators as extending from birth through age eight) in LCMS congregations, challenges and opportunities facing congregations in offering early childhood education, and models of launching early childhood education ministries.” The authors of the articles, editorials and book reviews “nailed” our intent.

As I reflect on the contents of the edition, it is not lost on me that early childhood education, a relatively new opportunity for ministry in the LCMS, began and has developed during the course of my lifetime. Born in 1957, I grew up with the materials which Jahsmann, Gaulke and others developed for Concordia Publishing House to be used in Sunday schools throughout the LCMS. As I was graduating from high school in 1975, *Project: Young Child* was being developed, and a new national position was being established to give direction to early childhood education in the LCMS. Called to serve as assistant pastor of Peace Lutheran Church in Park Falls, Wisconsin, in 1988, (a year in which the number of LCMS preschools was increasing by more than five percent), I had the privilege of helping to launch the congregation’s first pre-school and daycare program. As a member of St. John Lutheran Church in Seward since 1991, I’ve watched St. John’s Child Development Center blossom, flourish and move from rooms in a then-vacant residence hall on Concordia’s campus to a self-standing facility a few blocks from St. John and soon to a new facility on the St. John campus. I have also had the privilege of serving with LCMS early childhood education “giants” Lenore Diek and Leah Serck while observing hundreds of students complete their early childhood education degrees in order to be sent forth to serve in a wide variety of ministry opportunities in God’s church.

The growth of the importance, impact and influence of early childhood education upon children, parents, and families is significant and expanding. Countless people have come to know Jesus or have grown in their faith in Jesus through early childhood centers, programs and educators. In addition, early childhood education experiences have given parents tools to be more effective parents, have re-energized congregations in their mission outreach, have served the needs of the whole child in Christ-centered ways and have enabled the light of Christ to glow more brightly in the world around them.

The content of this edition of *Issues* is thick and rich in articulating both the need for early childhood education and the amazing Gospel ministry opportunities which early childhood education provides. May God continue to bless the more than 2,000 early childhood programs in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, the new programs He will raise up, those who serve and lead them, the children who attend them and the congregations that support and use them as “spokes” and “outposts” to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Brian L. Friedrich, President

Early Childhood Education: Children Need It

According to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly four million infants are born in this country annually. What will happen to all of these children? For me, two scriptural concepts define the need for educating those children at a very young age.

The first is to help parents meet the physical, emotional, spiritual, and educational needs of their children. Years ago, most parents were able to supply most of those needs because mothers or fathers were with their children a very high percentage of the time. Children learned executive thinking skills, practical skills, and social skills from their parents. Early elementary schools expected children to have mastered some of the basic skills and concepts even before they enrolled.

Parents today value their children no less than parents of earlier generations. However, today's society often pulls them in several directions in order to make financial ends meet. Unfortunately, many children live in homes where a single parent provides for them by working outside the home. Many are unable to give their young children the experiences necessary to prepare them for the education system they will enter. Because they value their children, parents look for a safe and nurturing place where they know and trust the caretakers and where they understand what will happen while their children are under their care. Most parents care deeply about how their children are treated, how they are protected from physical and emotional harm, and how they are prepared for future education.

Good early childhood centers offer physically and emotionally safe and healthy environments to help parents meet this first need. Quality centers lay a foundation on which future education builds. They enable children to learn skills that equip them to take full advantage of future educational experiences, such as self-control, patience, manners, and other social skills. Well-prepared educators understand that early learners are still developing their brains for learning. They provide activities and experiences that help young children develop properly by allowing them to play

and use their creativity to make and build things, draw and paint, and use their hands to manipulate objects with a useful purpose. This well-laid foundation allows later education experiences to develop academic and cognitive executive thinking skills so that when the students graduate from formal education, they are well prepared to perform as competent citizens who make valuable contributions to society. This is exactly the kind of help parents need and seek to assist them in meeting this first urgent need of their children.

The second need to address is the children's nurture and encouragement of spiritual lives. We in the Lutheran Church understand the need to address this issue very early in infant baptism. The Scriptures tell us that all people are to be baptized into the faith, including children. The Holy Spirit begins the work of faith in that little heart at baptism, but unless that faith is nurtured, it can be extinguished. Lutheran educators can relate incidents of tragedies where young lives have ended, making real the fact that life on this earth is fragile for humans of any age. It has been a comfort to me and to families who have experienced the death of a child to have witnessed evidence of faith in those children before they went to heaven. I am convinced that the spiritual welfare of children is an urgent matter because it has such eternal consequences.

German Lutheran immigrants who came to this country considered the education of their children to be a necessity, and a relationship with God was a priority. Adults in the family often modeled spiritual disciplines for their children, teaching them to pray and to trust. Fathers taught from Luther's Small Catechism as Luther intended. As groups of families formed congregations of Lutheran believers, they built churches, and they built Lutheran schools. They sometimes built a Lutheran school before they built the church. While it is true that one of the motivations for building Lutheran schools was to preserve the German language, a higher motivation, the spiritual welfare of their children, drove parents to expand and maintain them. I mention these things, not because

I believe that parents in the past excelled in that calling, but to point out the high value which those parents placed on meeting the needs of the children that would carry the faith and the culture to future generations.

Many of today's parents have expressed a need for help in nurturing the spiritual lives of their children because either they themselves do not feel they have the time, or they do not feel competent to do the job well. Congregations can be of great help to families because they have a responsibility to educate all in their fellowship in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, including parents and children. Congregations should have the resources and competent teachers necessary to do this task well. The congregation through its ministries should become the very best friend of the families they serve by helping parents equip their children for coping with life on earth even as they equip them to nurture that Holy Spirit-initiated faith for eternity. We can be sure that the children will be educated by someone. If parents are not able to carry out the task themselves, their children will be educated by other adults, other children, or the ubiquitous media. God clearly wants His people to learn what the Scriptures teach, to live lives motivated by love for Him and by love for one another because of the saving work of His Son, Jesus, rather than to live lives motivated by the ways of the world.

Good early childhood education is necessary. When parents are not able to provide it, the Church is in a unique position to help in so many ways. Congregations that provide for the early education of children can give those children essentials for living this life and for eternity. They lay the groundwork for children to acquire the necessary skill-set to become productive citizens in this society, and they nurture the God-given faith that leads to eternal life. Congregations providing early childhood training begin preparing people to carry on the faith from generation to generation.

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Joy in the Ordinary

It's been more than fifteen years since I transitioned from early childhood into other areas of ministry. The question I still hear is "What do you miss most about teaching?" Invariably my answer is "Joy in the ordinary!"

There's a reason wrinkles crinkle every time I smile—it's because of twenty years of laughter and delight as I helped hundreds of children navigate those precious early years of development. It's no secret that children are born with a desire to learn; they are sponges soaking up every interaction and experience in the world around them. Their faces are filled with curiosity; their lives are filled with possibility.

The early years truly are a foundation for learning and future success. I was blessed to be teaching during the evolution of developmentally appropriate practices. For me the writings of David Elkind regarding the power of play merged perfectly with Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development—most specifically, Erikson's Stage of Initiative vs. Guilt (Stage 3). They led me to frame a classroom that put as much, or more, emphasis on interactions with each other and the environment in meaningful ways over and against rote academic teaching.

Yes, it was normal practice in my classroom to "use your words" to resolve conflict. It was normal to be reminded that "only one person talks at a time" so that the children could begin to grasp the concept of what it means to be honored as an individual while still being part of a group. It was normal to have choice incorporated into "Discovery Time" so that they could navigate the landscape of problem solving. And it was normal to hear the chatter of language being enriched through self-expression, conversation, and the art of negotiation.

Getting back to Erik Erikson's Stage of Initiative vs. Guilt, it's the preschool years when children have potential for developing feelings of capability as they experience the successes and failures of directing play and social interactions. Their dress-up and

imitation of the adults they see in their lives is not mere child's play—it's setting the stage for the adults they will one day become.

I'm still in awe—so many years later—at the potential that oozes out of young children. I'm still in awe at the potential of each experience for laying the foundation for future learning. But then I take a step back and my awe changes into wonder at what happens to us along the way?

One could say that career-wise, I'm still trying to figure out what I want to be when I grow up. My first four years were spent as an admissions counselor for Concordia-St. Paul, followed by 20 years of teaching early childhood. Then God opened doors of transition that led to editing at Concordia Publishing House, creative development at Lutheran Hour Ministries, and now directing communications at Lutheran Senior Services. It's been a perfect blend of experience and learning. And while others assume that the corporate, nonprofit world is very different from teaching four-year-olds, I'd disagree. Along the way I've come to the conclusion that we're all just like four-year-olds—we're just in bigger bodies.

Rarely a day goes by where I don't see an article or posting about tips for nailing an interview or how to improve effectiveness in the work place. It all seems to boil down to what's termed as "Soft Skills" which include, but are not limited to, listening, adaptability, teamwork, judgment, initiative, communication, and positive demeanor. One author even linked them with phrases like: "What happens when you don't get your own way?" "Do you think before you act?" "Can you play nice with others?" "Are you nice to be around?"

Aren't these the very skills we were trying to teach in the early childhood classroom? And aren't they essential for every interaction both inside and outside the workplace? Maybe Robert Fulgham was on to something with his book title "All I Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten."

Please understand that I'm not advocating a lesser emphasis on academics. I'm advocating for a greater emphasis on that which does not come from books, but comes from ordinary, teachable moments.

Our Lutheran classrooms are the very best places for children to discover who God created them to be—not just who we, their parents, or the world expects them to be. They are the perfect places for teaching that mistakes are opportunities for growth, and that forgiveness is more than merely saying "I'm sorry." Every Bible story is rich with imagery of trust in God's promises, whether we are facing giants or need a touch of healing. The question becomes whether we are mining the ordinary as opportunities for extraordinary learning.

There are many mistakes I made as a teacher and there are many I continue to make in the corporate, nonprofit world. If we're honest with ourselves, we can all relate. But thanks be to God for bathing us in the grace that is ours through Christ. One of the greatest blessings of forgiveness is that the slate is wiped clean, and every day becomes a new opportunity for turning the ordinary into the extraordinary.

Where do we start? By looking to faces filled with curiosity and lives filled with possibility. We start by being open to learning from the very children we have been blessed with the opportunity to teach. We open our eyes to moments that invite conversation about what it means to be the hands and feet of Christ as we interact with others. We model patience and respect as we help children dissect problems and come to solutions that benefit the greater good, not just themselves.

If we are going to prepare children for life, whether it be in the early childhood classroom or beyond, we must equip them for dealing with the ordinary circumstances they will face along the way. And as we do, let's embrace joy in the ordinary. It's one of the biggest and best lessons I've ever learned.

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A Kingdom Opportunity!

It isn't easy to admit that we lost an opportunity. We had been blessed. Then the opportunity slipped through our hands. I passionately prayed that the Lord would open our eyes to see another opportunity.

So what happened? Pretty much from the beginning, St. Peter's, Edina, Minnesota, had a rich history in elementary education. Then, shrinking class sizes left us discouraged. We did all we could to increase enrollment. That even included expanding the preschool so that it would feed into the kindergarten and beyond. When combined classes resulted in empty classrooms, God got our attention to see a need all around us. The opportunity was as obvious as our receptionist wishing out loud, "If only we had as many parents calling to inquire about our elementary school as we do asking for infant care." Then it soaked in; why not use our empty classrooms to meet this need? An explosion followed, complete with two "baby showers" to repurpose classrooms with desks into warm spaces with cribs and curtains.

Once the Early Childhood Center opened, joy came when a couple of teachers approached me and said, "We've been talking to parents about the baptism of their children. Pastor, do you think you could offer a class to explain what baptism is all about?" I took the suggestion! In the next few months, we baptized eleven of these children. This was when I figured out that it wasn't the pastor whom the Spirit was using for these connections; it was the teachers.

As the babies grew, we realized that we needed to be more intentional in helping these families grow in the faith. The challenge involved working parents who weren't interested in adding anything else to their schedules, especially if it meant being separated from their children who were in child-care during the week. So our worship team, together with teachers, created "Fam Jam," a Sunday worship service for families that is very active, very energetic, a bit noisy, and overflowing with God's Word in ways that can involve people of any age. We learned that weekly preparation for this service is like leading Vacation Bible School every weekend. This engages one in ministry fifty-two weeks a year which calls for creativity and the involvement of teachers.

This sounds like a great opportunity, doesn't it? It was! Until we let internal frustrations and staff conflicts get in the way. As the teachers pulled back and were not encouraged to return, so did our ability to effectively reach the families with small children. We underestimated how God was using the daily contact of the teachers that resulted in accepted invitations to worship. Picture the joy of a three-year-old child who sees one's teacher involved in worship, whether it be reading a Bible story, talking to a puppet or leading an activity.

Taking advantage of such opportunities involves teachers. Why? Early childhood teachers not only have unique connections with children, but they also are trusted by

parents. Why wouldn't they be? Teachers interact with parents and grandparents most days of the week. It is exactly these kinds of relationships that lead to God's opportunities. The Holy Spirit uses teachers to reach the unchurched and dechurched in our communities.

The families of our early childhood centers need Jesus! Members of this generation often display a lack of interest in what the church offers and can make it clear that they have no intent to return to the church.

There is one word which stands at the center of the opportunities to connect with non-connected families and children through early childhood centers, the word "teachers." Teachers can open many doors to reaching family members who are not members of the Body of Christ. God has equipped them for this special ministry at this time. That's why we encourage them, value their participation, and don't stop thanking them for the impact that they are making. By loving children and taking an interest in their families, they are doing what Jesus did. What a Kingdom opportunity!

Mark Shockey, Pastor

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elementary school with a robust early
childhood education center).
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Early Childhood Education in the LCMS: Affecting lives and faith of young children and their families for generations

Note from the author: The historical content of this article was acquired from a history researched and written, at my request, by the sainted Marilyn Beccue, and the Reverend Carl and Marti Beuschlein. We celebrate their significant contributions to forwarding the mission of Jesus Christ with and among young children and their families. Their dedication to delving into the past enables us to celebrate, learn, and build on the foundation laid by the early education pioneers for the present and the future.

Past

The year was 1945. Harry S. Truman was President of the United States. In that same year, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod reported 127 kindergartens and one “nursery school,” a fact which was considered “a new phenomenon on the educational horizon of our country.” In that same year the Lutheran Education Association (LEA) published its second yearbook, which focused on “Christian

Preschool Education.” The volume demonstrates a growing awareness of, and commitment to, the education of the young child, shown in these words from the dedication:

“To the little child—
The example of faith
The future of the Church
The joy of the home
The hope of the nation.”

Second Yearbook, 1945, Lutheran
Education Association

In this same era, A.C. Mueller counseled: “Christian parents are asked to face the fact that Christian training begins at birth.” He authored: *Growing Up with Jesus*, a manual for parents and teachers (Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1948).

While the secular press poured out preschool educational materials, it was not until the late 1950s that Earl Gaulke arrived at Concordia Publishing House (CPH) to assist Dr. Allen Jahsmann in writing “Nursery-Kindergarten” materials. Dr. Jahsmann had been authoring these materials in 1957, as well as *Little Children Sing to God*, *A Child’s Garden of Song*, and *A Child’s Garden of Bible Stories*. Earl Gaulke conceived and edited the children’s magazine, *Happy Times*, which CPH continues to publish today.

While men and women of the Church produced and edited materials for the young child, there were still few religious materials produced for preschool programs. Sunday school and Vacation Bible School materials

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were adapted to fit the few programs that existed in the decade. For example, the Northern Illinois District of the LCMS reported only nine preschool programs at that time. In 1967, Rev. Dan Burow arrived at CPH and was instrumental in developing the *Mission: Life* material. The first curriculum to include preschool and the emerging full-day child care centers, *Mission: Life* recognized an unprecedented opportunity to affect young children's lives and the lives of their families with the extravagant love of Jesus Christ.

Preschool ministry was the proverbial "sleeping giant" of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Then, in 1970, the Yearbook of the Lutheran Education Association was devoted to early childhood education, and the organization established a department for early childhood educators. By 1976, 25 percent of LCMS congregations had one or more early childhood programs. Interestingly, there were no materials produced for "nursery school," and early childhood educators were not included in professional educator conferences until the decades of the 60s and 70s. Statistics demonstrate what was happening to this "giant."



YEAR	PROGRAMS	ENROLLMENT
1966	64	1,879
1970	120	3,436
1972	328	10,140

According to Doederlein (1945, p.77) the industrial revolution, economic poverty, war, urbanization, progressive education and the growth of life sciences, and the numbers of women who were entering the workforce all contributed to the growth of programs serving young children. The giant was no longer sleeping. It was awakening and stretching. By 1969, and through the 1970s, there were strong indications that interest in early childhood education was growing. In October of 1969 Dr. Velma Schmidt penned "Developments in Early Childhood Education" for *Lutheran Education*. In 1970, she followed trends by editing "Early Childhood Education and the Church" in the LEA Yearbook for that year. Again in *Lutheran Education* (November 1971), Irma D. Gross wrote "Organizing a Preschool."

The next year Beverly Beckman reported on a survey of the 52 "nursery schools" listed in the 1971 *Lutheran Annual*. At that time, the LCMS National Board of Parish Education began issuing publications offering helps for starting and maintaining preschools. Daniel R. Burrow asked a challenging question in the 1971 March/April issue of *Lutheran Education*: "What in Synod is Going On with Early Childhood Education?"

The Leaders. "...ask where the way is and walk in it." Jeremiah 6:16

Any characterization of early childhood education in its formative years will need to recognize what was occurring in the Church's congregational classrooms. Teachers in the field were anxious for organizational help from national church body leadership. The effective care and early education of young children was at stake! Who initiated the first step in creating an early childhood organization will forever be shrouded in the mists of history. Suffice it to say that women from the District of Columbia, Denver, St. Louis, Milwaukee, and Chicago were concerned about an organized effort on behalf of early childhood education. These early leaders included Beverly Beckmann, Marge

Foelber, Greta Matin, Marilyn Lindemann, Lenore Diek, Leah Serck, Velma Schmidt, Mary Manz-Simon, and Ann Reiser.

Realizing that something had to be done to further early childhood education, committees, meeting with open agendas, came together in three geographical areas. The Indiana District held meetings for interested teachers, led in part by Lenore Diek and Beverly Beckmann. The Michigan District looked to Chris Lehl, while the Northern Illinois District met at Concordia River Forest (now Concordia University Chicago), which was led by Dr. Shirley Morgenthauer and Marilyn Lindemann. These meetings would be the seed for the development of a later formal organization.

One such committee led by Beverly Beckmann met in Washington, D.C., to form a District Consultation Core Committee. Beckmann was also involved in the initial meeting for *Project: Young Child*, a synod-wide program, which set the pace for ministry with young children for the next decade.

The outcome of these activities, discussions and vision planning sessions, as well as from the voiced needs of teachers of young children throughout the LCMS, led to a formal request to the Lutheran Education Association to create a new department within the organization to address the needs of early childhood educators throughout the church body.

A meeting in conjunction with LEA and the National Lutheran Parent Teacher League convention held at Concordia Senior College in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, on July 31, 1971, created the new LEA department: the Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE), which still exists today. The roster of attendees included women educators from Indiana, Missouri, Illinois, Kansas, Oklahoma, Michigan, Texas, Arizona and New York. A "News on Convention" article titled "Women Take Helm of New Department" reported that there were 150 charter members in the new organization. Carl Rubow was the first president of the new department, with Lenore Diek and Mary Manz-Simon rounding out the DECE leadership team.

In the early 1970s, Concordia Teachers College in River Forest, Illinois (now Concordia

University Chicago), offered early childhood elective courses. In 1976 an early childhood major was approved and initiated. The following year, Concordia Teachers College in Seward, Nebraska (now Concordia University Nebraska), added an early childhood major. At present, all ten schools of the LCMS Concordia University System offer early childhood courses.

A Milestone. While people committed to early childhood education gathered together for mutual support and for ideas to extend their ministries, little was done at the national level until 1975. The Board for Parish Services of the LCMS presented a resolution to the LCMS Convention in 1973. Resolution 7-03 was titled "To Encourage Development of Early Childhood Education Programs." In Report 7-01, Recommendation 2 (Convention Workbook, pp. 296-297) the resolve reads: "That the Synod direct the Board of Parish Education to devote special efforts in the next biennium to this specialized field. *Project Young Child* was one of these "special efforts." The project was the vision of Melvin Kieschnick of the LCMS Board of Parish Education. On October 4, 1974, the stage was set to launch *Project: Young Child*. The Aid Association for Lutherans (now Thrivent) provided a three-year grant to fund the project. The chosen director of the project was Joanne Eisenberg. By September 1975, *Project: Young Child* was up and running. Over the next three years Eisenberg launched "Insights and Ideas," a publication for early childhood educators, which is still in publication today. She also initiated the idea of an early childhood consultant in each district. These consultants were volunteers. The Pacific-Southwest District of the LCMS was the first to add an Early Childhood Consultant to its staff: Marti Beuschlein. The consultants were trained at an annual conference, which continues to this day.

On March 1, 1978, Joanne Eisenberg was called to fill a new LCMS national position as Associate Secretary, Early Childhood Education for the Board of Parish Services, an office she filled until 1985. Marilyn Beccue followed Eisenberg, beginning her work on August 1, 1986. By 1986, children enrolled in LCMS

preschools had increased by 5.4 percent. Over 54,000 children were enrolled in LCMS preschools, resulting in a shortage of LCMS trained educators (only one-third of early childhood educators were LCMS trained). Among Beccue's many accomplishments was the project "Preschools in Mission," which provided workshops designed to clarify the mission of the preschool in LCMS congregations. In 1993 Marilynn accepted a call to be the Director of Christ Lutheran Preschool in La Mesa, California, and later, in September 1998, followed Marti Beuschlein as the Pacific Southwest District Early Childhood Consultant.

Leadership Today

Today's landscape both in the LCMS and the community is different from that in 1945 when the idea of an early childhood ministry in Synod's congregations was merely a dream of a few visionary men and women. The direction of this ministry passed from Joanne Eisenberg to Marilynn Beccue and then, in 1994, to Judith Christian. Christian inherited the direction of early childhood ministry in an age of upheaval and change, both within and without the church, and in an age when the very definition of the family was being debated nationally. Recent history (1994 to the present) is yet to be recorded, but suffice it to say, the rapid growth of early childhood centers, which now surpass LCMS elementary schools, has challenged the system.

The most recent *Lutheran Schools Statistical Data 2012–2013* indicates that there are currently 1,376 early childhood programs that are not part of elementary school campuses. In addition, the majority of the 871 LCMS elementary schools provide some form of early childhood education. The enrollment in these elementary school-based centers has also increased, with many serving more than 100 young children. The most recent report (School Year 2012–2013) indicates an enrollment of 121,980 children in LCMS Full Day and Pre-K programs. In addition, another 12,584 children are enrolled in LCMS Kindergarten programs. By comparison, reported enrollment in LCMS schools grades 1–12 is 96,251 children. Throughout Christian's tenure, staffing LCMS

early childhood centers with qualified teachers and administrators has challenged LCMS schools and congregations. A first-ever national study of early childhood centers, launched by her in 2003, verified the already apparent need for leadership development and training. Findings of the study indicated that approximately 33 percent of the directors had two or fewer years of experience, and that the majority of the respondent directors ranged in age from 40–59. The study also found that the average number of years served in this leadership position was six years, which suggested that a large number of vacancies would need to be filled around 2009 and beyond.

Early childhood director training and development became the focus of Christian's leadership. The publication *Time Out for Directors* had been launched early in her tenure with the first author being Marilynn Beccue. Responding to the already articulated needs of early childhood center directors, the publication became a training resource and the focus of the annual meetings of early childhood consultants, which centered on leadership development, training and support. National goals for directors were established and widely shared. During Christian's tenure early childhood directors began to be included in LCMS district and national school administrator conferences, and were well represented at the 2008 (Chicago) and 2011 (Orange, California) National Children's Ministry Conferences, as well as the 2010 Children's Ministry



Workshop (Wausau, Wisconsin). All were established under her leadership. With the arrival of William Cochran as LCMS Director of School Ministry, early childhood educators identified as future leaders were included in the School Ministry SLED program (School Leadership Development), which has become a well-respected avenue for preparation of future administrators. Today, it is not unusual to discover that administrators of LCMS elementary schools were formerly early childhood center directors, and the system continues to work at identification of qualified individuals to administer early childhood centers.

The restructuring undertaken by the International Center of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod as per a resolution passed at the 2010 Synod’s National Convention resulted in the dissolution of Children’s Ministry at the LCMS International Center in St. Louis. At the time of the dissolution, Children’s Ministry had national responsibility for supporting the denomination’s districts and congregations in their service to early childhood centers, all other congregational children’s ministries, and family ministry. The responsibility for support of early childhood centers was reassigned to School Ministry in the newly created National Missions. The other areas of children’s ministry and family ministry have not been reassigned. At this writing, an Associate Director of Early Childhood Education is being sought for National Missions: School Ministry.

Future

Our State of “Being.” John Westerhoff stated, “A school is to be an educational ministry, not to have one. It has been a neglect of this understanding and practice of education that has prevented us from becoming more faithful, and its practice will be essential if we are to reach our potential as Lutheran schools” (1997, *Lutheran Education*, 133(1), 5-12). The future of early childhood education in the LCMS and Lutheran education in general, is predicated on mission and purpose, opportunity, adaptation, standards of quality, fiscal responsibility, community support and qualified, knowledgeable, energetic, collaborative and imaginative leaders (all staff and administrators), who themselves are life-long learners. However, critical to both the present and future of early childhood education and Lutheran schools in general is clarity around the dialectical struggle found in “school.” The Lutheran early childhood center by its very nature is law oriented. There are clear standards—expectations—for children and teachers (as well as parents) and consequences for failing to meet those standards. At the same time, we must dedicate ourselves to applying the Gospel, extending grace daily to all others both personally and professionally. Consideration of the balance of law and gospel must be reflected in disciplinary practices, curricular choices, class sizes, and other educational and managerial decisions.

We must set ourselves apart. *Being* different is our strength! One of the greatest challenges facing care and education in Lutheran schools today is our *being* the very people we say we are. We must lead by example, practicing and exemplifying grace-filled behavior daily in our actions, reactions, and interactions. We must faithfully evaluate the manner in which we relate to all others: co-workers; children; parents; and community. The center’s climate and culture reflect our faith.

We must not only tell the story of salvation but also give clarity to it. Children (as well as their families) need to be exposed to the words and ways of the people of God. We must serve as role models for the Christian life of faith—teaching and modeling, speaking and acting in healthy faithful ways, demonstrating

understanding and freely extending grace and forgiveness to all those who come into our sphere of influence. Our faith-filled living permeates the school environment. Key questions include: What is our language? What do people see, hear and experience in our places? Do children hear and practice the words, “I forgive you because Jesus forgives me” or “I love you because Jesus loves me”? Do families say, “We expected high quality care and education for our child, but we got something more”?

Quality of Care and Education. Lutheran Early Childhood Centers must exemplify high standards of excellence in care and education. Accreditation is a recognized measure of standards for excellence. Yet, only ninety-three LCMS early childhood programs are reported to be accredited through LCMS National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA). Although at this time, there is no official report pertaining to such, it is known that some LCMS early childhood programs are accredited through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or other accrediting agencies. The accreditation process is one of self-evaluation for the purpose of improving our practice for the benefit of children. We must systematically and faithfully examine and evaluate our educational philosophy, purpose, goals, practice, conduct, climate, curriculum, culture, facilities, and other standards of child-care and learning. At this time, school accreditation is the recognized process for self-evaluation and assures the public of a certain level of quality.

Leadership. It is critical that leaders are focused on the efficient and effective operation of the early childhood program to accomplish God’s purposes and contribute to the dynamic pursuit of Christ’s mission. They prayerfully lead into the future with a vision revealed by God, equipped by Him with new skills, and more collegial and collaborative styles of leadership. They are competent, confident, committed, connected and courageous. They are life-long learners. They work with a bold vision, courageously taking informed risks, set challenging goals and attaining standards of excellence. They are engaged in energizing and enabling others to act on behalf of children.

They vigorously defend, protect and interpret the center’s purpose and mission, which is Christ’s mission. And, they relentlessly guard against accommodation, the adoption of a scarcity mentality, and acceptance of the limitations of current situations.

Funding. Current reports (*Lutheran Schools Statistical Data 2012–2013* school year) indicate that: 10 percent of operational funding is provided by the host congregation; 83 percent of funding support is tuition and fees; and 7 percent comes from other sources. This financial reliance on tuition and fees presents significant challenges to the provision of affordable care and education and to adequately provide for the salaries of qualified administrators and teachers as well as high quality teaching and learning resources and facility maintenance. It is imperative that an entrepreneurial approach to funding be undertaken by all leadership. This may mean identifying individuals (governing body, administration, congregation members and/or individuals in the community) with financial development experience and inviting them to actively participate in advancing the ministry of early childhood education and to mentor or coach leadership in financial planning and development.





Early Childhood Education: Challenges and Opportunities

God gives the responsibility of caring for children and teaching them His Word primarily to parents. Christian early childhood centers serve as support to families, assisting them in building a better foundation of Christian love and understanding in the lives of their children through daily contact with His Word. As early childhood centers seek to meet the needs of each child, teachers adapt curriculum, teaching methods, and structure so that the developmental needs of the whole child are met—physical, intellectual, social, emotional, aesthetic, as well as spiritual.

Implementing this role of the early childhood center is not a small undertaking. As Matthew 18:10 reminds us, “See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.” It is a great responsibility to labor through the sanctifying work of the Spirit to lead these little ones to the arms of their heavenly Father.

Challenges and Opportunities

Early childhood centers offer both challenges and opportunities to congregations. At times, the challenges may seem to be heavy burdens. The cost, the time investment, the wear and tear on the church facilities, and the rigorous licensing requirements all can weigh down or even drain the joy that is possible in an early childhood program.

The challenges that congregations face may be seen as obstacles or as steps to providing quality ministry to children and families, knowing that we are never alone and that our Heavenly Father will guide our journey. God promises in Genesis 28: “I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” That promise can sustain us through any challenges we might face to grow His kingdom through Lutheran early childhood centers.

Cost

Many congregations address the burden of the cost of a Lutheran early childhood center by requiring the early childhood center to be financially independent. While the business-minded view holds that this is wise, it does raise the question of whether we can then call the early childhood program a true ministry or merely a program. Quite often, self-supporting early childhood programs must scramble to find financial donors to help defray costs for their programs. They may decide to reach out to find grants, such as those provided by the American Academy of Dermatologists “Sun Shade Grant” or individual state grants that may be available. In some instances, early childhood directors must expand their use of outside resources to help maintain quality.

These outside resources provide an excellent source of additional funding. However, it would seem that congregations should be supporting the early childhood ministry just as any other ministry offered by the congregation. Quality ministry to families does not come free. We must address the congregation’s commitment to children whom they can serve physically, spiritually, and financially. The benefits of ministry through early childhood

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programs will far outweigh any financial cost a congregation incurs.

A pay-off of early childhood education centers can be seen in a statement made by the founder of the “Zero to Three Movement,” J Ronald Lally: “What is built in infancy steers our future learning. The early development of our brains is truly a school readiness activity.” During infancy critical brain development is taking place. Research clearly shows that we must start early and pay attention to this most rapid brain development time. Today, quality infant care is extremely difficult to find at an affordable cost. Families are struggling to find quality care, with infant care ranging from \$200 to \$400 a week.

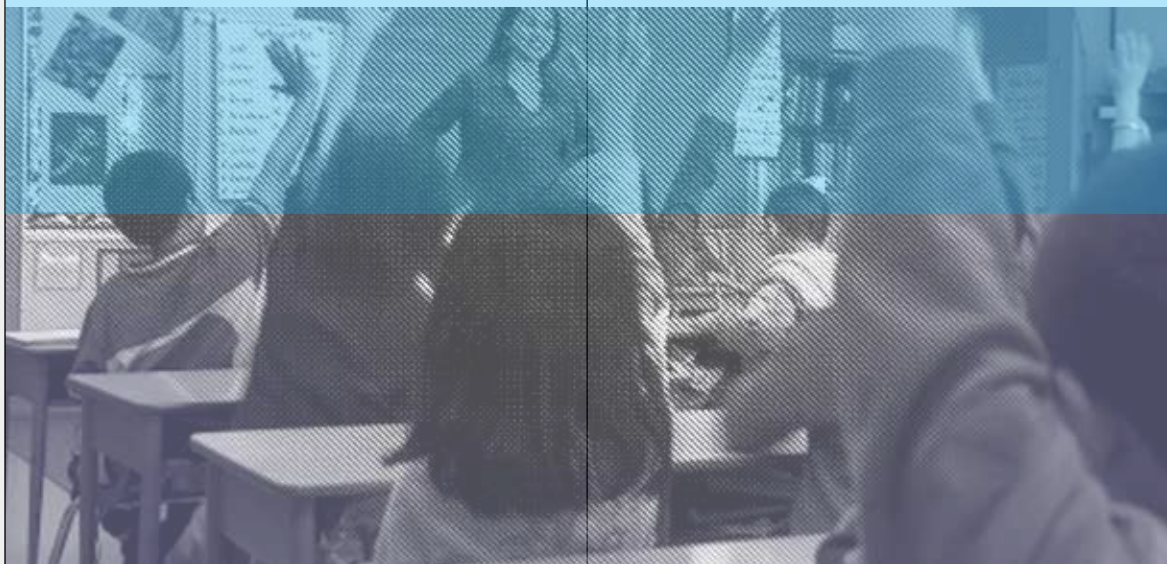
How can we minister to these families who are searching so desperately for quality care for their most precious gifts in the world? Infant care is certainly not a big money maker. In fact, it is often seen as barely breaking even. Congregations should consider investing in infant care, since it is a time in a family's life that provides a window of opportunity. Parents come to the church seeking assistance and care. When the church responds to this need, it finds

the opportunity to share the Gospel as well. Infant care is ministry that will pay off for the child and the church. Ministry to these families, especially a ministry that focuses on baptism, is at a prime time for these young families.

It is vitally important for congregations to reach out to the families that are or could be walking through their doors. Ministry should not be dependent solely on the cost to the congregation, but seen as resulting in the eternal benefit for children. Ministry to children and their families should never take a second seat to the finances of the church. Building the right foundation for infants can help optimize the probability of success for children in the future as well as the growth of the church. Lutheran early childhood centers are on the forefront of education and the mission field by reaching out to the families in our own communities.

Licensing

Licensing requirements over the last ten years in most states are increasingly more rigorous. The ultimate goal of licensing in the United States is protecting children. At times, the



regulations and paper work can seem like a mountain that we must climb to secure care for children and hire staff. The staffs of Lutheran early childhood centers must have a clear understanding of the relevant state and local regulations. Being knowledgeable about state regulations brings credibility to a program. Parents want to know that their child is receiving the best care possible. High quality early childhood centers take the necessary steps to be licensed.

Licensing requires directors to maintain centers that are safe and staffed appropriately to meet the expectations of their state. Additional steps to become accredited can help a center reach the next level of quality. Accreditation by NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) or NLSA (National Lutheran Schools Accreditation) is a great achievement for any center. Hard work by the entire early childhood staff can pay off with accreditation and most importantly a high quality center.

Developmentally Appropriate

There has been great emphasis placed on early childhood students to become grade level competent, to complete standardized tests, and to focus on math and literacy skills. There is currently no research to support the pushing of school age standards down to pre-school, and yet our culture of testing seems to demand it. The ability to maintain a classroom that is developmentally appropriate is becoming difficult during this age of testing. Lutheran early childhood centers are not exempt from the pressure that society is placing on them to place more emphasis on children's cognitive development.

Research has clearly shown that we must address all aspects of the child—social, emotional, physical, spiritual, aesthetic, and intellectual. For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics concluded “that play was essential for healthy brain development.” Lutheran early childhood teachers need to understand the development of children and what current research is saying about how children learn. When we understand how children learn, we can share that information with parents and explain how and why we

have designed the curriculum. We must arm ourselves with the vital information of developmentally appropriate practices so we can meet the needs of children and help them to develop an enthusiasm for learning.

Some of the most remarkable learning happens through child-directed play. We can build and scaffold on that learning in our early childhood centers through developmentally appropriate activities. Lutheran early childhood centers are positioned to be the leaders in the preservation of developmental practices, demonstrating that while our world has changed, God's design for child learning remains the same.

Modeling Jesus' Love

One of the great opportunities of early childhood education is the sharing of the love of Jesus with each child on a daily basis. This unique ability of Christian early childhood centers is the heart of Lutheran early childhood centers. What great joy we find when a two-year-old tells mom and dad the story of baby Jesus and his birth “in a dangerous manger—but don't worry God was protecting him.” With awe and wonder, we watch these little ones comfort one another with a pat and hug and words of comfort, such as “Don't worry, Mommy will be back.” We know that we are models of Jesus for these young children. They see the love of Jesus in us.

What a great responsibility we have to share that love in all we do with the children. The grace we show to children as they learn through mistakes is like the grace our heavenly Father shows us through our own daily sinful walk. The seeds of the Word of God we plant in these young lives are there for the Holy Spirit to work faith into their lives. Lutheran early childhood centers take this seed planting responsibility very seriously. We understand that without the message of salvation, some children will not see heaven. We want children to grow intellectually as well, but we are educating for eternal life. As George Barna wrote: “We can strive to give our youngsters all the advantages the world has to offer, and motivate them to make the most of available opportunities and resources. But, unless their spiritual life is prioritized and

nurtured, they will miss out on much of the meaning and purpose and joy of life.” We want Lutheran early childhood centers to be places where children are nurtured in their spiritual lives every day!

Relationships

Developing relationships in our early childhood centers is a key opportunity of this ministry. The joy in relationships expressed in the everyday language of children is inspiring. Their simple enthusiasm for life reminds us of how fearfully and wonderfully we are made. As one child stated, “Hi, my name is Brett, and I do tricks.” That relationships with children can be exhilarating, amazing, and loads of fun, is seen, for example, in a child’s question and response: “What’s for lunch?”... “Yum! I’ll probably need two trays!” The innocent joy we see each day brings a smile to our faces and joy to our hearts.

The early childhood classroom is often a child’s first experience with a teacher. It is critical that their first experience be filled with grace and love. Letting a child know that one is loved and cared for will provide a sense of security. That feeling of safety and security developed through a good teacher-child relationship is crucial in the early childhood setting. Having a close relationship with an early childhood teacher is often the cornerstone of a child’s first educational experience. It is vital then that Jesus be reflected in all we do as early childhood teachers.

The relationships we develop with the parents in our early childhood programs are as wonderful and joyful as the ones we develop with children. Parents provide the unique opportunity to minister to adults in a child-friendly way. Parents are often seeking a trusting and warm relationship with the early childhood staff. Parents have a wealth of knowledge and understanding about their child and are our best ally in working with their child. High quality centers seek parent input and realize the importance of a healthy relationship between staff and parent.

Parents can serve as board members, fundraisers, advertisers, supporters, prayer

warriors and advocates. When parents have complaints, how wonderful it is for them to know that you care and want your center to grow and learn from mistakes. Making a faith connection with parents is our ultimate goal. We want to connect with them on a spiritual level and encourage their faith walk as a family. Reaching out to families and going the extra mile through parenting classes, baptism opportunities, a pastor-greeter, and family activities let families know how much we care. The relationships we create with families during the early childhood years can have eternal consequences.

One of the great blessings of my own ministry has been the relationships that have developed among the staff of the early childhood center. What another wonderful opportunity for ministry! Staff can grow in their faith-walk by listening to the faith stories of teachers and children. The bonds among staff that have been created through working with young children have been full of joy and promise. Creating a warm and safe environment for a large staff to feel welcome and important to the early learning experience is vital. A team approach to the early childhood center is most



beneficial to young children. “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27). Everyone on the team seeking to share the love of Christ with parents, children, and each other exemplifies the Great Commission in action.

Another opportunity for early childhood centers is growth in the relationship between the congregation and the center. How wonderful for congregations to see baptisms, new members and joyful children and parents who are involved in early childhood centers. Our church buildings are being used to their fullest potential by families and children who are involved in an early childhood ministry. The mission field is walking through the doors being opened by this ministry. Congregations are on the forefront of evangelism by reaching out to children and parents in their communities through early childhood centers.

Connecting

It is important for congregations to know their communities. What better way to get to know your community than through a high-quality early childhood center. Pastors who are active in

their early childhood centers will find families that are hurting, celebrating, weeping, loving and searching. Congregations can revel in the fact that they are helping to plant the seeds of faith in young children. Early childhood centers can connect with their communities and congregations in many ways. Visiting with and singing for residents of nursing homes, quilting ladies, and Bible study groups helps children and members of a community and congregation to connect. Special events like Veterans Day, grandparents’ day, and “Hearts for Jesus” promote connections. The congregation in turn can provide opportunities for connecting with the larger community through free parent morning coffee times, parenting classes, and prayer groups.

The Future

The future holds great potential for Lutheran early childhood centers. Yes, there are many questions that lie ahead in the future. What will happen if there are federal or state sponsored early childhood centers? Will Lutheran centers be able to maintain a ministry that is vital to their communities? Will Lutheran centers find ways to meet state standards while keeping ministry as the number one objective? How will Lutheran early childhood centers continue to meet licensing requirements? No matter the fear or worry, we know that God will guide our path. “The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?”

Lutheran congregations and early childhood centers need to stay on the forefront of early childhood education. This means staying tuned to legislation, state regulations, accreditation, and community needs. Maintaining high quality centers that put faith in Jesus as the cornerstone will bring joy to our Savior. The mission of early childhood centers is to grow our Heavenly Father’s kingdom. No matter the challenge, with prayer and God’s Word, we can face these obstacles so that God’s light will shine through early childhood centers and the ministry they provide on a daily basis to grow the Kingdom.





Ways Christian Early Childhood Education Can Make a Difference

Early Childhood Education has been around for many years. It started out as “Nursery School,” continued as “Pre-Kindergarten,” and now encompasses children from birth to second grade.

The years, birth through five, are very important in a child’s total development. The human brain develops more rapidly between birth and age five than during any other subsequent period. Children cultivate 85 percent of their intellect, personality and skills by the age of five years.¹ This is also true of their faith development.

What’s Needed for Early Childhood Education to Impact a Child’s Development

Developmentally appropriate early childhood education centers* need to provide opportunities for children to explore their environments at their own pace. A wide variety of materials need to be provided to enable children to learn through play and hands-on exploration, including items for faith development such as Bible story puppets, Bible character dress-up clothes, Christian symbol cookie cutters with play dough and various other items.

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Through this type of learning, children test new knowledge in a relaxed setting and then naturally relate it to existing knowledge and experiences.

Daily opportunities need to include both large- and small-muscle skills development, the practice of developing social skills, and exposure to rich language experiences in all activities. Exposure to language creates the foundation for a child’s use and understanding of words, and increases the likelihood of reading success at a later age. Research shows that the richness of a young child’s verbal interactions has a dramatic effect on vocabulary and school readiness.

It is important for early childhood centers not to be pressured into “more academics at an earlier age” view as a better way to prepare children for “school.” Children need concrete, hands-on activities to develop pre-reading, pre-math, small-and-large-muscle, language, and social skills so they are prepared for more formal instruction as they progress through the various grades. David Elkind, noted author of child development resources, states, “The characteristics of learning readiness are developed rather than taught, and only through numerous concrete interactions with the world can a young child prepare to benefit from formal instruction later.”

*When the term “center” is used, it is referring to all ages and sizes of early childhood ministry, ranging from a one-class preschool to a multi-room, multi-age childcare center.



As early childhood programs and centers are growing in Lutheran churches and schools, it is important that their early childhood directors, teachers and staff understand child development. These leaders need to be able to communicate this perspective to church boards and members, parents, and the community as they provide a learning environment that is child-centered, age-appropriate, and reflects the joy of Jesus in all they do.

In today's society, there are many dysfunctional families, single-parent families, grandparents raising their grandchildren, children with emotional and social issues along with many children exposed to things that are not age appropriate. These children need to feel safe and comfortable in order to have continued excitement to explore and learn. Therefore, it is especially important that Christian centers provide a safe, caring environment where children and parents can feel Christ's love radiating throughout the center.

The center needs adults who allow children enough time to try things over and over again. Young learners need someone who is available to help and encourage them when things get overwhelming in new situations.

It is important that the emotional and faith development of each child is nurtured and not overlooked or blamed on behavior issues, bad parenting or home environment. Every child who enters a Christian center/classroom should know that he or she is a special child of God's

and should feel safe and cared for by being showered with Christ's love. It is these types of centers that are not only going to grow and flourish, but are truly carrying on the ministry to which the Lord has called us.

How Can Early Childhood Centers Sponsored by Congregations Make a Difference?

Congregations need to take an active role in the early childhood ministry just as they do with all other ministries. The congregation's mission statement should reflect not just the church programs and goals, but the total ministry of the congregation which includes the early childhood center. This should then be posted in various places around the center and church, in the staff and parent handbooks, on all social media as well as newsletters and brochures for both the congregation and center.

A church is like a wagon wheel. The center of the wheel (hub) is the mission statement, and each spoke is a ministry and mission of the church. A wheel which has a broken spoke or one spoke that is larger or smaller than the rest does not roll evenly. Therefore, each spoke of the church's wheel needs to be viewed with the same importance reflected in the ministries of the pastor and members of the congregation. Unfortunately, the early childhood center can be a spoke that is overlooked, with the attitude being that they are their own entity who can take care of themselves.

In some instances, an early childhood center can be blamed for the budget problems of the church because the center is not self-sustaining. Members of a congregation need to ask such questions as: “Are Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, or the youth group self-sustaining or self-supported?” In some instances, an early childhood center is viewed as a part of the wheel that really isn’t as important as the rest of the ministries. A view that an early childhood ministry is okay as long as it does not interfere with other groups or activities such as LWML events, Bible study, or funeral dinners can be expressed in a number of ways.

Such views and opinions do not allow the early childhood center to truly be a ministry of the congregation which carries out its mission statement. These views prohibit the staff from having the support they need to reach out and witness to the children and families, not only in the classroom, but also during times of joy and crisis.

What’s Needed in Early Childhood Centers

All curriculum, activities and environment of the center should be based on the mission statement and then carried out in accordance with the mission. Walking into a Christian center should be a totally different experience for a parent/guardian than walking into a secular center. The welcoming environment should be filled with Christ-centered posters, bulletin boards, books, artwork, etc., that let everyone know that this is not just an “early childhood program,” but that Christ is the center of this place, and that it is a ministry.

The staff attitude, behavior, body and verbal language should reflect the mission statement/philosophy of the congregation at all times, regardless of the situation. Kind words, caring gestures, taking time to listen, and showing genuine love must be part of the daily life of a center.

The entire day of the children who attend the center must be permeated with the love of Jesus. Simple things such as a devotion book and Bible in the family living center, Bible story puzzles, Bible characters in the block area, and

Bible story books in the library area will say to children that Jesus is with them in everything they do.

Prayer needs to be offered throughout the day and not only at the opening and closing of a day or at meal times. Impromptu prayers that are spoken when someone is hurt or sick, needs forgiveness, shares a joy, becomes a discipline problem or is involved in other situations go a long way in modeling prayer life.

Discipline should be intended to correct a child in order to learn to change one’s behavior rather than being seen as an act of punishment. Incorporating confession and forgiveness in all situations should occur first rather than being seen as an after-thought.

It is important that teachers and staff willingly admit mistakes and ask children, parents and Jesus for forgiveness. This is not only biblical, but it also provides a role model for those who are involved in the situation as well as for those who are witnesses.

When planning the curriculum and program for a Christian early childhood center, it is important to intentionally include



opportunities in and out of classroom time for the faith development of children. Also needed is finding opportunities to equip parents with tools and resources to assist them with their own faith-walks as well as their children's. Some possibilities include:

- posting family devotions on a blog or website;
- naming tips for parents, prayers or songs children are learning at the center, and open ended questions to discuss at home that accompany the weekly Bible story;
- hosting a family event to help prepare for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, or other events. These events could include a Bible story, snack, craft, take-home devotion or ideas related to the season of the church year;
- providing take-home bags for children to check out with an age appropriate Bible story book, a family activity that connects with the story, or a children's CD;
- building a parent library that offers resources such as devotion books for young families and middle-age adults, parenting resources, and discipline resources;

- providing a list of Christian websites that relate to parent issues, activities with children, or specific subjects such as discipline, emotional behaviors, or blended families.

These suggestions require investing time and money. However, if a congregation truly cares about the salvation of the children and their families who are entering their building, resources, staff, and volunteers will be made available to carry out the plan of bringing the Good News of Jesus to parents and their children.

Church boards, a task force, an appointed committees or another entity need to take an annual inventory of what's happening in the early childhood ministry. This inventory not only needs to examine equipment and supplies, but also the environment, both physical and emotional, the attitudes of staff, and the curriculum. Possible questions in the inventory include: "Do the parts of the center's ministry reflect the mission statement? Does the congregation see the early childhood center as a part of its total ministry? Is the center carrying out its role in this ministry? Do the children see Jesus in their teachers and staff? Do the parents witness Christian role modeling when they are present at the center? Does the staff regularly use teachable moments to nurture the faith of the children and parents?"

What's Important in an Early Childhood Center

Many children deal with some type of special need. This could be due to a non-safe or impoverished home or to a physical or learning disability. Christian early childhood centers should be willing to embrace these children with open arms as Christ embraced those whom He met and ministered to.

It is important to minister to the child's or family's immediate needs in a kind, compassionate way to let them know they are cared for no matter what their situation. Jesus himself was a perfect example of this as He always met the physical or emotional needs of the person before sharing God's Word with them.



As a person's immediate needs are cared for, one can begin to build a relationship. As this relationship grows, trust also develops along with the realization that one is genuinely cared for out of selfless love. When this takes place, ears and hearts are opened to listen as the Good News of Jesus is shared.

Working with some situations may mean that some modifications need to be made in the schedule, the building or room arrangement. An open mind and a willingness to be flexible in checking out all the possibilities are needed. It is important to keep in mind that the center, the staff, and the ministry need to focus on what is best for the children. This means that the solution is not always easy, and that work and cooperation from everyone are important.

The reality, however, is that a center and its staff cannot have all the knowledge or resources to meet all needs. Therefore, it is important to be aware of all the resources that are available in the congregation and also in the community. These resources may include but not be limited to health care workers, social workers, occupational and physical therapists, police officers, food pantries, abuse hotline numbers, Christian counselors, homeless shelters and other resources that could be tapped for advice and/or assistance.

Some communities have a brochure listing social agencies and hotline numbers along with other resources that are available in the area. If such a brochure is not available, it is worth the time to investigate available help and make a list that can be shared with families.

Developing a good working relationship with the local public school staff also is a way to become familiar with resources and personnel who can offer assistance when issues arise.

Children who are going through difficult times, whether physical, developmental, or emotional, need extra attention. When it is not possible to give the attention that is needed, finding volunteers in the congregation who have a love for children, a caring heart, patience, and a passion for outreach can be an asset in these situations. Caring grandparents, retired teachers, non-working empty-nesters can give love and support to these children by assisting

them in working on developmental skills. Reading a story, rocking a child, or simply telling a child that one cares can go a long way in helping one's development during the early years of life.

These same caring adults will be building relationships with the children that may carry over to the parents, and therefore open doors to do ministry that relates not only to physical and emotional needs, but also to the spiritual.

An Open Mission Field

Every congregation that has an early childhood center should see it as an open mission field on their campus. Many children who attend Lutheran early childhood centers come from families that do not have a faith background or a home church. They attend the center because of the quality care and reputation. What a magnificent opportunity the Lord has given to a congregation!

In order for this spoke on the wheel to remain strong and sturdy, it takes a team effort on the part of the early childhood director, staff, school principal, the pastor, and the members of the congregation. By working together, they can develop ways of living out their mission statement to connect families and the congregation.

Using congregational volunteers to work with the children is another way to connect and start building relationships with the children and families. Another way is to brainstorm opportunities to build relationships, uplift children and parents, and guide them in their spiritual walk with Christ.

There are countless opportunities and ways to do this. For meaningful and successful outcomes to occur, an intentional plan needs to be put into place. This could begin with a task force that includes the pastor, director/teacher, principal, an active young church family, a family involved with the center, and several members of the congregation. Questions to explore include: Are we a family-friendly church? Do we have an inviting nursery? Is it staffed adequately? Is it accessible? Do we provide children's bags during church? Do we include responsive readings that are repetitive

for non-readers? Are new young families made to feel welcomed at church activities? Is childcare provided during Bible study or adult events?

A next step is to examine other questions such as: What are the needs of the families who enroll their children in the center? How can we reach out and assist them with their needs? What can we do as partners in nurturing faith? What can we learn by doing a survey?

Planning to Connect

A planning group can consider starter ideas for connecting the center, families and congregation, such as:

- Include all center families on the church mailing list or social media for newsletters, information, etc. (Assure those who are active in another church that you are not trying to get them to change their memberships, but want them to feel welcomed.);
- Intentionally invite parents/families to church events such as parenting or faith-building classes, Moms Morning Out, young adult Bible studies, church suppers, and picnics;
- Develop a system for including family prayer requests in the church's prayer lists or prayer chains;
- Partner each child attending the center and a member of the congregation. Give the prayer partner the date of the child's birthday and names of family member so that they can pray for the entire family. Encourage the prayer partner to send cards for Christian holidays. Set up events where prayer partners can personally meet families;
- Have a church staff member or volunteer visit families who have new babies. Give them a small baby basket made by a church group. Include items such as a Baby Jesus book, a parent's prayer, and a small toy. Share information about baptism during a visit;
- Ask a pastor or other church staff member to call on families in crisis situations. In order for this to be effective, the pastor/staff needs to be greeting parents as they bring or pick up children at least once a week;

- When there are joyous events such as the birth of a baby or difficult times when one is hospitalized or a family member is dying, develop a plan to send cards, take food, run errands, provide transportation or offer financial assistance if needed;
- When a family who is involved with the center attends a worship service, connect them with a church family who can serve as mentors;
- Host a special event such as "Parents Night Out" that involves both center and church families in order to foster relationships. Provide free child-care and offer activities for children of all ages;
- Staff and children of a center can make pictures or cards for those who are in a hospital or who are shut-ins. The pastor or those who make visits can deliver the cards;
- Children can sing at LWML events, Bible study groups or for other groups which meet during the day;
- When the center is hosting an event or activity, invite congregation members to attend and build relationships. This can be done at fundraisers and at other events such as "Muffins with Mom," "Donuts with Dad," or game nights.

Since each congregation and center are unique, it is important to look at the community and congregation in developing a plan.

Early childhood centers in Lutheran churches do make a difference, socially, physically, academically, and spiritually. These differences can be even greater if a congregation which is truly following its mission statement will embrace a faith-based, age appropriate early childhood center as a part of its mission and ministry, partnering to nurture and bring the Joy of Jesus to those whom they serve.

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Faith, Family, Child, and Church: Feeding His Lambs

At a time when the Roman Catholic Church desired to keep its adults ignorant of church doctrine, Martin Luther turned the church's heart toward educating its youngest members.

Luther wrote: "But praise and thanks be to God, who has long since countered the devil's intentions and put it into the heart of an honorable and wise council to found and equip such a splendid and excellent school... For in this they have shown generous Christian consideration of their subjects, contributing faithfully to their eternal salvation as well as to their temporal well-being and honor. God will assuredly strengthen such a work with ever increasing blessings and grace..." (Luther, 1967, p. 213)

Luther's sermon was in response to a church community's practice of taking children out of school once they could do simple math and reading. Luther wanted parents and church leaders to understand the importance of raising children for God's service. He spoke passionately about the future need for "pastors, preachers, and schoolmasters," and he also drew attention to the value of Christian workers in government, medicine, law, and business. He likewise spoke, at great length, regarding the value of Christian writers. Writers are those

who are able to share wisdom with others. Given the fact that the printing press was the social media of Luther's time, we can safely equate this with training our children to use Christian discernment in all of their communications. Luther also spoke of the value of the ability to distinguish between God's work and man's wickedness. These are certainly valuable skills in the age of the Internet.

Luther was wise in thinking that the young are more easily trained. The Bible instructs us to "train up a child in the way he should go" (Proverbs 22:6, ESV) for good reason. The learning of a young child is foundational learning upon which everything else builds. Early learning of Christian values, as well as the experience of integration of the faith, will not only set the stage for future learning, but will determine a path as well. The child who learns humility, for example, to put God and the needs of others before personal needs will view the purpose of all other learning differently than from the child who seeks learning for personal reward. In fact, humility can lead a child to be motivated toward mastery learning rather than performance learning, resulting in deeper learning as well as more effective use of new skills (Dweck, 2008). The gift of an early childhood Christian education is one that just keeps on giving!

Luther's sermon on children and schools also reminds the church of its task to instruct fathers and mothers in their duties regarding the education of their children. Churches can work to create stronger families with parents equipped to raise their children in the Lord.

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“My son, keep your father’s commandment, and forsake not your mother’s teaching. Bind them on your heart always” (Proverbs 6:20-21a, ESV). A strong, faith-filled family life is a lifelong blessing to the child and to the Church.

Integrating the Faith

Integration of the faith into the life and teaching of the family results in several unique developmental advantages for the child. In writing and speaking to groups of parents and teachers, my favorite topic is that of emotional development. Emotional development is described as a soft skill that has a significant effect on a child’s ability to learn and work with others. Emotional development can be referred to as a different way of being smart. These are skills related to executive function skills: skills that direct and influence the brain processes involved in learning. These processes combine intellect with emotional and social skills (Galinsky, 2010). While the research shows that academic growth is supported by healthy emotional development, one can see in research studies how faith development in children supports emotional development. God’s plan for our spiritual well being goes beyond our faith life and permeates our ability to learn and grow in fellowship with others.

The first and foremost lesson faith teaches is unconditional love. “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8, ESV). God’s love models for us a way of loving our children that assures them they can do nothing that would make us love them less, and they can do nothing that will make us love them more. This love is not earned; it is given. Knowledge of this kind of love creates a sense of resilience that allows a child to overcome and learn from disappointment. This love creates a safety net that permits a child to take a risk trying something new. Children who fear risk, who avoid challenging tasks because they fear disappointing others, severely limit what they can accomplish. They spend their effort maintaining their reputation instead of engaging in challenging activities that result in new learning (Dweck, 2008).

The world says we should celebrate our abilities, and that it is our fear of failing that

holds us back. In contrast, Scripture tells us we should repent of our inadequacies and accept God’s mercy and forgiveness. It teaches that guilt is healthy, and instead of leading to feelings of shame, guilt when connected to the grace of God leads to repentance and forgiveness. Faith teaches our children that they cannot be successful, but that God is successful through them. It teaches our children that they cannot walk alone, yet with God they can learn, grow, and work in God’s kingdom. This is a powerful message.

As children learn to repent and accept forgiveness, they develop the capacity to forgive others. With this capacity comes a new skill of perspective-taking. Young children begin to see situations from the perspective of another, a skill modeled for us by Christ. The act of perspective taking develops cognition by making abstract thought possible (Galinsky, 2010). Again, we see how God’s plan for the faith development of a child encourages not only emotional development, but cognitive development as well. “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways” (1 Corinthians 13:11, ESV).

Research in learning points to the benefit of approaching a problem with a positive attitude. Hopeful children walk the path to confidence (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The teaching of faith defines hope as the assurance of what Christ has already accomplished for us. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him



by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6: 3-4, ESV). When we teach children the faith, we do not give them a hope born of crossed fingers and anticipation. Instead, we bless them with the confidence that their life and work are in the hands of their Heavenly Father. This is a confidence that survives failure and disappointment.

While preschools often focus on learning letters and numbers, most teachers (and researchers) will tell you that school readiness is also about self-regulation. This is the ability to regulate attention, behavior, and emotions. Without these three skills, learning activities will literally go in one ear and out the other. From this, we begin to understand the value of children learning obedience in the home and school setting. The learning of obedience teaches a child to focus on something someone else (teacher, parent, peer) is interested in, to inhibit the desire to do as one pleases in order to turn attention to learning, and to regulate one’s emotions by understanding a different perspective on what one is doing and why. When the Church assists parents in teaching their child the faith, the blessings of the tenets of faith are realized in spiritual health, emotional health, social health, and learning. From this, we see the promise of Matthew 6: 33: “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (ESV).

Whose Responsibility to Teach?

The Bible is clear on the responsibility of teaching children. Parents are commanded to integrate faith teachings into each aspect of the day as they are instructed to “teach them diligently to your children, and ... talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deuteronomy 6:7, ESV). Scripture also shows us evidence of the responsibility of the church when we remember that Samuel, at the tender age of three, was brought to the temple to learn (1 Samuel 1: 21). Luther further supports this when he teaches that children will not learn through sermons alone, but instead

benefit from teaching in the “language of children” so faith lessons take root in their hearts (The Book of Concord, 1959).

At home, faith should be a part of each daily activity, and at church the faith should be presented not only for adults, but also for children. In this way, children see faith as a part of everything, and see their own faith learning as valued by their church.

So what does it mean for a church to be involved in early childhood education? It does not mean the church should take over the responsibility from parents. The church renders poor service if it leads parents to believe that Sunday school, preschool, day school and confirmation complete the task of teaching the faith. Similarly, the Church abdicates its responsibility if it assumes that offering education opportunities is the sum total of its responsibility. The work of the Church is to teach the faith and to support parents in this task. This responsibility can, and should, take on many forms. It should especially involve both modeling and valuing early childhood faith education.

Ways the Church Can Teach

Churches model faith education when they engage in educational activities that not only teach children, but demonstrate integrating the faith for parents. Realizing that parents are eavesdropping on worship service children’s messages, I have learned to end the message with an assignment for parents to help them continue the lesson with their children when the service is over. In a similar vein, our church offers a Sunday school class designed for parents to attend with their infant or toddler. The simple lesson offered during the class helps the parents to learn unique and effective ways to share their faith with their little ones. Churches also can model faith education through family events, parenting classes and parenting resources—all wonderful opportunities to teach faith integration.

Churches show value for faith education when they support Sunday school, day school, and child development centers verbally, monetarily, and in facility use. Questions that can be asked include: “How often do parishioners

hear about and celebrate faith education opportunities? Are the congregation's children and family ministries expected to earn their keep financially, or are they supported by the church budget with the realization that these are ministries that need to put people first? What about facility use; are young children relegated to dark basement corners, or do they have the space and facilities necessary for safe and edifying play and learning?" Churches are encouraged to examine such questions from the perspective of workers, children, and parents.

Faith development also is valued when children and faith milestones are visible and integrated into the worship experience. The rite of Baptism celebrated during the service shows the value of this faith-giving sacrament. When Bibles are handed out and school book-bags blessed, children see evidence of faith being a part of every aspect of life. When children's choirs sing for worship, the message is clear that worship is for all ages. Additionally, when a worship service occasionally includes children's songs, known by heart from childhood, and pastors sometimes stop and explain aspects of liturgy, both parents and children come to realize the importance of including children in worship. These small things give a strong message of the Church's commitment to teach parents how to teach the faith. Additionally, when worship includes such "milk" along with "meat," it reteaches adults and explains to those who are new to the faith.

When we teach, we cherish through care and nurturing. Our children are a gift deserving of that care. A comprehensive early childhood ministry is an important step toward cherishing children as well as growing the future Church. Luther set the stage when he coupled eternal salvation with temporal well being. Teaching parents how to share their faith with their children, demonstrating the importance of early childhood faith education, and celebrating faith learning at every age are vital ways to cherish each member of God's Church.

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Starting a Christian Childhood Ministry

Immanuel Lutheran Church in Glenview, Illinois, was a congregation in serious decline in 2000. They had organized in 1876 as a rural congregation, and they began a Lutheran elementary school shortly thereafter. Over the years, the congregation grew to some 800 baptized members. Their school enrollment grew as well, and in 1952 they built six new classrooms, a library, gymnasium, and kitchen. In 1967, they added additional space for church and school.

But by 2000, when Rev. David Barber accepted their call as pastor, Immanuel's worship attendance and membership had dropped significantly. By August 2003, they realized they could no longer support the school with its declining enrollment. Thus, what had once been a beautiful, thriving ministry was becoming a more ghostly presence in Glenview almost by the month. The remaining members were deeply concerned about the survival of the congregation.

FOLLOWING HIS YEARS AS A LUTHERAN TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL, MARTIN BARLAU SERVED AS THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY-MISSIONS FOR THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN DISTRICT, LCMS, WHICH LED, IN TURN, TO HIS SELECTION AS THE FIRST EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR THE NEWLY FORMED OPEN ARMS INSTITUTE, DEVOTED TO THE CONCEPT OF CHURCH PLANTING AND GOSPEL OUTREACH THROUGH CHILDCARE MINISTRY. MARTIN.BARLAU@GMAIL.COM

Rev. Barber and the members worked diligently to assess the reasons for the decline and to find ways to turn it around. They used the demographic resources of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund and the local United Way to learn more about their changing community. They concluded that a Christian early childhood program could answer a need in the community and give the congregation a bridge to the new homes and families that were arriving there.

After attending an Open Arms Orientation Conference in November, 2004, to learn about starting a full-time Christian early learning center, Rev. Barber came to feel more certain that the concept offered some hope for renewal of the congregation's program of ministry. The congregation president joined him in leading the congregation to convert the school classrooms to meet state childcare regulations and to call Wendy Pritchard as the director for the program. The Open Arms Institute provided operational manuals and other guidance.

Their Open Arms Christian Child Development Center opened in January 2007, offering full-time care for infants through five year-olds. Today, the center enrolls more than 100 children, at least fifteen of whom are in Kindergarten. The program is fully self-supporting, and also contributes to the support of the congregation's entire ministry.

In the process, Immanuel has learned that starting a full-time Christian early learning center can be very challenging for

a congregation. Without a lot of prayer and without the right leadership and guidance, the project could easily fail, even after operating for a while.

But Immanuel has also now come to see itself as a “130 year-old mission outpost.” They are learning and applying ways to develop closer relationships with the families who come to them through the Open Arms Center, and to draw those families into God’s family, the Church.

A Christian early childhood program, whether part time or full time, can indeed be a bridge to the homes and families of a community. These programs vary from congregation to congregation, but in almost every case, they reach numerous families outside of the membership of the congregation.

Types of Christian Early Childhood Programs

In the field of early childhood education, the terminology has become somewhat confusing. “Preschool,” “early learning,” “childcare,” “child development,” “academy,” and even “school” may be found in use by various programs addressing the education needs of children age five and younger. The usage tends to vary somewhat by community or by geographic region. For purposes of this article, the two most common forms of such programs are listed and described here. In each case, we refer exclusively to those programs which include a Christian spiritual growth component in their curriculum.

A) PRESCHOOL - Part-time programs for three and four year-olds. The term “preschool,” or even “school,” is sometimes used to identify a full-time early childhood program. But historically among our Lutheran congregations, the term has referred primarily to part-time programs for ages three and four, which is what we reference here. However, some of these “preschool” programs are now adding “before and after” care, or “extended care.” Such a program becomes essentially “full time,” and is described in section B, below.

Preschools are the most common early childhood programs among the congregations of the LCMS. They became popular already in the

late 60s and early 70s, and have become a part of the offerings of most Lutheran elementary schools, just as the kindergarten programs did in an earlier era. Many congregations without schools have adopted preschool programs as well. They are fairly simple to inaugurate and can often be housed in existing Sunday school rooms. They are also generally self-supporting in providing staffing and materials.

Typical Schedule – Preschools typically serve three and four year-olds for half-days, with the fours on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and the threes on Tuesday and Thursday. Some preschools offer five half-days per week for four year olds. This is true especially in states where public funding is available to cover the tuition for some or all of the children. If the numbers of children are sufficient, the program will serve two different groups in morning and afternoon sessions each day.

Preschools generally follow the public school calendar of the community.

The Curriculum - The curriculum has a spiritual basis for all of the learning, and includes a designated “Jesus Time” for learning about life with God. In addition, preschools include an emphasis on the language arts and math, with some attention to social studies, science, art, and music, as time permits. A snack is served, but usually no meals. Where the program accepts state funding for some or all of its enrollees, there are likely to be some specific requirements for the curriculum.

Potential Clientele - A preschool program serves primarily those families with stay-at-home mothers. Someone has to be available to bring the child to the preschool at 8:30 or 8:45 a.m., and pick them up again three hours later. Because the hours of operation do not generally coincide with the typical work day, working parents will find providing for the child’s care for the remainder of the work day to be difficult.

Standards and Regulation – This varies greatly from state to state. Several states such as Florida and Georgia offer funding for tuition if the preschool qualifies for inclusion in their program. They set the standards for teacher qualification and curriculum, as well as for the required hours of care per school year.

Florida permits religious instruction as part of the required hours, while Georgia does not. Therefore, a Christian preschool that participates in the Georgia reimbursement program must find a way to provide religious instruction outside of the reimbursed hours and also of the designated classroom.

In some other states, preschool programs are hardly regulated at all. Indeed, if conducted as part of a Christian elementary school program, they often come under the much less rigorous standards of the state department of education.

Funding – The National Institute for Early Education Research offers a very comprehensive report on the status of state preschool programs.¹ As near as we can determine, twenty-nine states currently provide some level of funding for faith-based preschool programs. In twenty of these states, the support is based on family income, at least to some extent. In a few cases, the state funding covers nearly the entire cost per child.

B) CHILDCARE or CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTERS – Full-time early childhood program. A full-time early childhood (childcare) program also incorporates a typical preschool program, as shown in the diagram at the end of this article.

Though the concept of full-day childcare has existed since about 1850 in the United States, with some exceptions, Lutheran congregations have begun to offer the program only in fairly recent times. At St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Denver, Colorado, Rev. Ed Keiper and his wife Gertrude began an elementary school and childcare ministry in 1970, two years after the congregation was organized.

In the latter 1980s, Rev. Robert Scudieri of the English District of the LCMS teamed with Rev. Philip Kuehnert, pastor of Ascension Lutheran Church in Atlanta, Georgia, to lead Ascension to begin a new mission congregation in Alpharetta, Georgia. In the process, Ascension inaugurated an Open Arms early learning center at their own location, and then started the new mission in Alpharetta with a second Open Arms Center. Rev. Kevin Elseroad, pastor of the new mission, used the multi-purpose room of the childcare center to gather a core of members and to found

Christ the Shepherd Lutheran Church. Today the congregation averages more than 400 in worship, with 195 children enrolled in the Open Arms Center in last report.

The success of the concept in Alpharetta spawned a number of similar programs, both as new mission starts and in existing congregations. In time, it led to the establishment of the Open Arms Institute. Since 1999, the Institute has promoted the concept of Christian full-time childcare, offering guidance, consultation, and operational manuals to help congregations achieve success.

Typical Schedule – Full-time childcare programs typically serve children from six weeks of age through age ten or twelve. For those above age five, the center provides before and after school care for children from neighboring elementary and middle schools. Centers operate from about 6:00 or 6:30 a.m. to 6:00 or 6:30 p.m., five days per week, all year long, closing only for a few primary holidays when parents are usually home with their children.

Curriculum – The childcare operating schedule provides time for a much broader curriculum, and more and more states require



the use of an approved curriculum for licensing. This has brought about a change in the programs from earlier times when childcare was more often equivalent to simple “babysitting.”

A number of highly developed curricula are available, including some for Christian centers. Teachers are required to prepare and post weekly schedules and lesson plans and to identify goals and objectives for ages, infant through age five. The curriculum must cover every area of child growth and development, including cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development. It must address all the major learning areas, including Reading and Language, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Art, and Music.

Potential clientele – Full-time childcare programs can serve the needs of every home with young children, whether parents are working or not. They serve both the homes needing preschool only, and those needing full-time care. Such a broad “market” can result in a very large enrollment.

Our Savior’s Way Lutheran Church in Ashburn, Virginia, was another new mission congregation that began a Christian early learning center to reach the homes and families of the community. Their Open Arms Christian Child Development Center has now grown to a licensed capacity of 504 children. Thus they are sure to see some 400 different parents come through their doors twice daily, some as many as five days of the week. This represents a spiritual harvest field that is surely dear to the heart of the Lord Jesus, ripe with opportunity for sharing God’s love by Word and deed.

Standards and Regulation – Every state has a highly developed set of regulations and requirements for any childcare program serving more than about five children. Licensing is required, and regular evaluation visits should be expected.

The reasons for all the regulation are two-fold. First, children are vulnerable, and parents can hardly evaluate the quality of care without taking off from work periodically. Furthermore, far too many childcare operators would otherwise care more about their income than about the quality of their

care. This has been demonstrated repeatedly, even under regulation.

Funding - The second reason for heavy state regulation of childcare programs is that the federal government provides funding for full-time childcare for low-income families. Some states add additional funding of their own. Therefore, states must assure that the funds are accomplishing their intended purpose, namely to prepare children for success in their school experiences and for life in general.

Starting a Program of Christian Early Childhood Education

If a congregation is to start a program of Christian early childhood education of any type, it will need to deal with a number of issues, and take it step by step. The most significant steps are identified and described here.

Pray About It. It is not possible, of course, to overemphasize the importance of prayer to cover every aspect of the ministry of a congregation. It is especially important when planning to add another form of Gospel outreach and Christian nurture, because it will require divine wisdom and power to accomplish the intended goals. Furthermore, if successful, a program of Christian early childhood education will constitute an invasion of Satan’s territory and draw some children and families away from his grasp. Therefore we can expect him to try to thwart or repel it. Prayer will be the only sure answer.

How beautiful it can be to see a Christian congregation unite behind some new venture for the Savior’s mission, under God’s blessing. But how painful it can be to see a congregation divided and segmented over the impending changes. And the truth is that too often it is the congregation that needs the new venture the most that will struggle the hardest, because the members have become locked into a self-satisfied mode of ministry, and they have lost contact with their changing community.

Those who are moved to pray should do so constantly, until they are joined by more and more of their fellow members and begin to feel the urge to move together from one step to the next.

Set the Vision. Some members of the congregation will likely be opposed at first to the idea of adding an early childhood education program to the congregation's existing ministries. This is true especially if they are part of the older generations when the prevailing thought was, "Those little children should be at home with their mothers." Other members may favor the idea, but for the wrong reasons. "A childcare program will really help our budget." All the prevailing thoughts and feelings should be drawn out and considered, and then molded into a common vision.

The pastor and some key leaders will need to develop the vision and share it, progressively, with all members. This may take time. Other articles in this edition of *Issues in Christian Education* can be helpful for this purpose. The facts about child rearing and childcare in the nation should be brought before the members. The need is enormous. Shouldn't God's family, the Christian Church, be standing in the stead of our Savior to "...take the little children in [His] arms and bless them"?

To help develop the vision, a group of members might arrange to visit another fine Christian early childhood program nearby. Or, a neighboring pastor or director of a sister congregation with such a program might come

to a meeting and answer questions about the concept. A parent from the congregation or the community might come and speak of the need.

The goal for the visioning stage of this process will be the adoption of a formal resolution by the governing body of the congregation to **establish a committee or task force** to explore the next steps to be taken. This committee must include at least a few of the recognized lay leaders of the congregation, so that they will be heard more clearly when they share the results of their work.

Study the "Market." Before getting too enthusiastic about adding any ministry program, a congregation should assess the need. In the case of a Christian early childhood program, how many children may be expected to enroll? To begin to answer this question at minimal cost:

- 1) **Survey the congregation**, formally or informally, by asking parents of eligible children if they are interested in such a program;
- 2) Get acquainted with any similar **existing programs** in the community and learn how many children are enrolled, and whether the program is at capacity;
- 3) For a full-time childcare program, ask **state licensing authorities** how they assess the need;
- 4) Compile the findings and discuss them. Share them with the congregation.

If the prospects prove encouraging, this may be enough to allow a congregation to move forward with plans for a **preschool** if space is already available. But if remodeling or new construction is required, and especially if considering full-time childcare, the findings should be verified by a **formal market research study**. Two sources for providing such market research are the following:

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This can cost as much as \$15,000 or more if a large geographic area is to be surveyed. But these are dollars well spent because they enable the congregation to plan for the spaces more exactly. Or, if the results prove to be negative or discouraging, it will allow the congregation to abandon the project, and thus prevent the loss of all the startup costs.

When studying the enrollment at existing centers in the community, note that a high quality Christian center can expect to draw enrollees from those centers over time, due to the probable image of better safety and quality through its connection with the church. Parents do place a premium on the quality of their child's care, and they share both their satisfactions and their disappointments about a center with fellow parents. Most parents will not hesitate to move their child if a new center offers some clear advantages.

The Open Arms Center at Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church in Ashburn, Virginia, was started right beside an existing franchised center. The Open Arms program grew and grew, to a capacity of over 500 as noted previously, while the franchised center next door remains at its original capacity.

Resolve the Space Issues. Does the congregation already have the space(s) needed to house the numbers expected for the contemplated program? If so, are the rooms properly sized for maximum efficiency? This is key for a full-time early childhood program. State regulations will determine how many children may be cared for in a given space. Ideally, a room should be large enough to hold a double group of children at the given age, based on the state ratios and group size limits. This reduces the cost of staffing because it allows the group, at maximum size, to be cared for by a lead teacher and an aide or assistant who is paid a reduced wage.

For a preschool program, there will be more flexibility in the use of spaces. Unless the program also comes under state regulation, the rooms should be sized to house the largest group of children that a teacher will want to care for, with or without an aide.

If either remodeling or new construction is needed, the study committee needs to learn the approximate cost of providing the required

space. An experienced director of a neighboring program can be helpful for determining the space needs in relation to the projected enrollment. For a full-time childcare program, state regulators should also be involved in determining the spaces needed. Then an experienced building contractor can assist in determining the probable cost.

Prepare a Business Plan. At this point a congregation should look closely at the overall financial picture of the proposed new venture. A fairly detailed business plan or *pro forma* will incorporate all the identified costs, including any financing. It will also project the enrollment as it increases, and will show the probable income along with projected expenses. The resulting operating balance will indicate whether the congregation can afford to offer a program.

For a preschool, a one-year business plan should be sufficient. It will show how much the congregation should expect to subsidize the program. Typically, tuition income should cover all the cost of staffing and materials. The congregation might expect to cover the utilities and janitorial costs.

For a full-time Christian early learning center, a three-year projection is needed. The resulting monthly balance should become positive at some point in the first 18 months, and remain there for the duration. Such a program, if properly managed, can cover all the costs of operation as well as any financing needed for construction or for startup.

Make a Formal Decision to Proceed. With information based on the foregoing study and planning, the committee should make a presentation to the congregation-at-large. Then it should be brought before the governing body for a decision. If the decision is to proceed, the congregation will implement the following actions, as needed:

- 1) Approve the application for financing, if needed, with the Lutheran Church Extension Fund or another source;
- 2) If remodeling or construction is needed, a building committee should be appointed and given the charge to complete the work. When the construction is nearing completion, the congregation can proceed to step three;

- 3) When questions about space needs are resolved, then the congregation should establish some form of governance for the program and give that body the responsibility for the actual inauguration and conduct of the program. It should also be made clear whom this new board or committee is to report to and how members will be selected in the future. This may require an addition or amendment to the Bylaws of the congregation;

In planning a preschool, the existing board of parish education can perhaps assume this responsibility. But for a full-time early childhood center, a separate board is advisable because of the work-load. The board of parish education will have a difficult time giving the Sunday school and other programs their proper attention if burdened also with the childcare program.

Choose a Director. The most important decision for the governing body of the program will be choosing a director. No other individual will have nearly as large an impact on the success of the program. This is especially true of a full-time early childhood program. The distinctions between the part-time and the full-time roles are significant, and should be noted.

Preschool director. The preschool director's role is relatively simple and easy in comparison with that of a full-time childcare director. First of all, the preschool is in operation only during the local school year, and only on the days when school is in session. Staffing is primarily a once-a-year function. Teachers are hired for the duration of the term and for a given age level. This rarely changes once the year is under way.

Enrollment is quite constant, with little change from August/September through May. There is rarely any need to shuffle staff or students to make room for more, or to accommodate fewer with less cost.

State regulation, if present at all, is less demanding. So the entire administrative load for a preschool director is relatively easy, and tends to focus on the quality of the program and the relationships with parents.

If the preschool is part of a school program, the principal should be able to rely on the abilities of the director to inaugurate and conduct the



program under her/his supervision. It will be similar to adding another room or grade.

The Concordia University System has proven to be excellent at preparing directors and teachers for preschool staffing. While it is always better to have an experienced director for the start of a new program, we have seen some recent graduates who have been successful as well. And as teachers, they have proven to be superb, almost without exception.

Full-Time Early Childhood Director. A full-time early childhood program, especially one of any size, will be the closest thing to a business operation that any congregation has experienced. The monthly financial balance of the program will have the capability to bless the entire ministry of the congregation, or to bring untold stress upon all concerned. The difference will be in the performance of the director.

First of all, the program is in operation every working day of the year. But not all children are present during all the hours of operation. Therefore, a director must continually match staffing with the number of children on site during every hour of operation. Too few staff, and the center can be written up by state regulators. Too many staff, and the bottom line turns red.

Therefore, staffing and enrollment practices are the beginning of a successful operation. They keep a director quite busy all year long, because both staff and students come and go



all year long, all week long, and all day long. The goal here, of course, is to keep each room filled to capacity with students, every hour of the day, but served with the minimum of staff.

The finest quality of Christian care and learning should be the goal or “end” of a successful operation. This too is the director’s responsibility. It is not easy to find a director who has the gifts, the training, and the experience to handle the challenges of staffing and enrollment along with the quality of care. These require different gifts. The best directors, therefore, will have the gifts for the business side that lead them to delegate one or both of these primary responsibilities to other staff and encourage and lead the staff toward excellence.

If the center is to be part of an existing school, it will be important for the principal and board to realize that they are likely unfamiliar with the management practices needed for success. They need to find these in the new director. By the same token, the director must recognize the role of the center in the total ministry of the school and the congregation. It will require time and effort to coordinate the programs and maintain a united focus and goal.

Prayer is once again an essential part of the search. Jesus is also looking for those who can lead and nurture His people. He knows some faithful Christians who are presently serving a secular center in the community or elsewhere, but who would eagerly join a congregation’s

ministry team so they can be a stronger part of the Savior’s mission. Thus, it behooves a congregation to look wherever they might find someone with proven success and experience in full-time early childhood education.

In one case, a congregation found that skillful director among its own membership. But that individual was managing a sizable insurance office and had no direct experience in managing a childcare center. Yet she proved to be the answer to the congregation’s needs after acquiring the necessary credentials, because management gifts and skills are applicable across varying disciplines. Leading people, sensing and understanding cash flow, and recognizing efficient practices are skills that will make the difference in any business endeavor.

With the right director in place, a congregation can expect that person to assume almost all of the responsibility for launching the program. The governing body, the staff, and members of the congregation can become encouragers and prayer partners while they look for individual ways to be of service to the program from time to time.

Looking for Guidance

There is no need for a congregation to consider or undertake the start of a new Christian early learning program on its own or to repeat some of the missteps that others have experienced. A number of sources can offer guidance and encouragement for the project.

District Education Executives – If they lack the personal experience that would be helpful, they will be able to lead a congregation to others who have found great success.

Staff of Neighboring Congregations – If the distances are not too great, a pastor or director or lay leader will usually be willing to spend time helping another congregation sort through the issues and find the best answers.

The Open Arms Institute – Since 1999, the Open Arms Institute has worked with congregations and their full-time Christian early learning centers to identify the best practices and to share them with existing ministries and with those who are considering a program.

Along with manuals of operation and many other helpful documents, the Open Arms Institute has a Business Plan Template, for example, that is very thorough in determining the financial outlook for a full-time center of any size. A “Startup Timeline” is also available to guide a director through the process.

Membership is required for access to the available documents, but the monthly membership fee is miniscule in comparison with the value of the guidance available.

Contact the Institute at:
openarmsinstitute.com
888-958-OPEN (6736).

A Local Multi-Center Management Firm – In the Twin Cities of Minnesota, we have learned of an individual who has leased space from as many as five congregations and who conducts full-time Christian childcare ministry in those spaces. We expect this formula to become more prevalent in time, because it avoids so much of the risk and so many of the challenges involved with a congregation doing its own startup.

In this model, of course, it is essential to have an understanding with the operator that the program must be an integral part of the Word and Sacrament ministry of the congregation. The pastor must be allowed to shepherd the staff, the children, and the families of the center. Preferably, the teachers and other staff of the center should be members of the congregation or become members over time. With such a relationship, the center can indeed be the congregation’s own ministry.

Conclusion

The children of our nation are crying. Even some of the children of our congregations are being lost for the lack of a thorough program of Christian education for all age levels. Many Christian churches have only the barest of programs to nurture and care for the newest generations, while the parents of those children have to rely on Christ-less programs for the help they need.

The Lord Jesus is yearning to take all of these children in His arms and bless them. He has appointed us, His body, to do this, to

disciple all nations. The Lutheran church has a long history of excellent Christian education and nurture for her young. But there is much greater need to expand these efforts today in more congregations.

The task is not simple or easy. It can require sacrifice and effort on the part of pastors, school principals, other congregation staff, and individual members of congregations. There will be challenges and disappointments. Some of the earlier preschools and childcare centers, though begun with great hopes, have failed and are closed. In a few cases, even a congregation has failed as a result. But many are succeeding splendidly. Praise God!

These new avenues of Christian ministry are proving to be a blessing not only to the children and families they serve, but also to others. Wendy Pritchard of Glenview, Illinois, tells about a member who approached her after church on one of the first Sundays she was present. He informed her that his family did not approve of her presence nor of the Open Arms program she had been called to inaugurate. Wendy simply continued with her work, making an effort to involve individual members in preparations for the program. Eventually the disappointed member even came to lend a hand.

Then, about a year later, Wendy received a phone call from the man’s wife. He was in the hospital, not expecting to live, and was asking if Wendy would come to visit him. As Wendy stood beside his bed, the member expressed, through tears, his deep appreciation for her presence, and for what she had done to enhance the ministry of Immanuel Lutheran Church. He had come to see the program as a blessing to himself and his family as well.

May God’s blessings attend us as we seek to nurture and disciple his precious children and their families!

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- I <http://nieer.org/publications/state-preschool-2012>

Comparing a Christian PreSchool w/a Full-time Christian Childcare Program

		A Typical Day						
		Part-time Preschool		Full-time Early Childhood Learning Center				
		Program	Activities	Program		Activities	Ext. Care	
6 a.m.								
7:00		Note: Actual times will vary for both programs. This represents a basic configuration.		All ages begin to arrive. Staff grows as needed. Some multi-age grouping. Vacant rooms used for Ext. Care.		Breakfast for early arrivals, ages 6 wks to 10 or 12 yrs. Free play.		Extended Care for 5s-10s or 12s. Can include devotion. Children bused to Schools
8:00								
9:00								
				Children move to regular classrms as numbers grow.		Help w/school work for 5s-10s or 12s if needed.		
10:00		Typical Morning Session for 3s or 4s, depending on day of wk.	Begins w/ Jesus Time, prayers. Then reading & language, math, art, music. Mid-morning snack. Some free play time.	Similar to Part Time Preschool (Left), but for all 3s or 4s en-rolled, de-pending on day of wk.	Typical morning sessions for all other ages, 6 wks to 4/5, in their rms., grouped by age.	Similar to Part Time Pre-school (Left)	Begins w/Jesus Time. Planned program of child growth/ development for each age level. Covers all Learning Areas. Mid-morning snack; Free play; Interest Centers.	
11:00								
12:00								
1:00				Lunch Time				
2:00		Duplicate of Morning Session for a new group of 3s or 4s if needed.	Duplicate of Morning Session for a new group of 3s or 4s if needed.	Duplicate of Morning Session for a new group of 3s or 4s if needed.	Some children are picked up. Others are dropped off for p.m. care. Those not in Preschool remain in their rooms.	Duplicate of Morning Session for a new group of 3s or 4s if needed.	Nap Time for all not in Preschool	Busing from Elem./Middle Schools
3:00							Book of the Day. Continue learning activities, Music, Art, Interest Centers, Free Play.	
4:00								
5:00				More and more children are picked up. Staffing is reduced to meet needs.		Free play or learning centers, library, etc. until pickup. One on one time for teacher with children.		
6:00				Children are re-grouped as desirable, enabling interaction with other age children.				
		Serves families w/3s & 4s who are free to transport children mid-morning, mid-day, or mid-afternoon. Low Tuition. Simple to staff and manage Relatively unregulated if serving only 3s and 4s less than 4 hrs. per day		Serves all families w/children ages 6 wks. to 10 or 12 yrs. Higher Tuition. Very highly regulated. Very complex to manage, with varying hrs. of enrollment per child, varied staffing needs, strict child/teacher ratios, and maximum group size limits. Allows for a higher level of socialization among children, and closer attention to every part of a child's growth and development. It also makes for a much closer and a longer lasting relationship between teacher and parent, and between families and the church. Gives a pastor more opportunities to develop relationships with children and parents.				



Parent Education: How Important Is It in Early Childhood Education?

Parent education is a component of almost every early childhood education program. Teachers and administrators struggle to provide new and innovative ways of providing parent education programs. Parents expect to be provided with some type of parent education programs, and yet, they fail to attend these programs. Both teachers and parents are disappointed in the lack of attendance at parent education programs. Teachers are disappointed because of the time and effort they put into planning and executing parent education programs when only a few parents actually attend these programs. Parents are disappointed in not being able to attend parent education programs due to over-crowded family schedules and commitments.

So, why do we, as teachers and administrators, continue to expend the energy to provide parent education programs at our centers? Why do accrediting agencies such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) continue to include parent education programs in their standards as a requirement for accreditation (NAEYC, 2005)? Why are exemplary programs noted for their parent education programs? Why do we, as early

childhood teachers and administrators keep trying to draw parents into parent education programs? Do we believe that we are the masters, and that parents need to know what we have to share? Do we believe that we are the experts, and that we should be teaching parents as well as children? Isn't it enough that we teach the children? Is it also our responsibility to go beyond teaching children to also teach parents? Is there even a need for parent education in today's society in which parents are highly educated and knowledgeable? Is it possible that parents could parent without parent education?

Parenting Today

Just how are parents in the United States doing at parenting? According to Reeves and Howard (2013), it is not a simple answer. It is the parents' responsibility to raise their children to be contributing members of society. Parents are their children's greatest influence and their first teachers. But, what training do parents have to be parents? As a society, we license lawyers, educators, all medical personnel, and many other professionals. Anyone, however, can be a parent. No license or training is required. Where do we get our training to be a parent? For the most part, parenting is learned by watching our own parents. Whether good or bad, we tend to follow the model of parenting that our own parents have provided for us.

Reeves and Howard point out that most parents are doing well at parenting, and that some are even doing great. They also point out

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that a minority of parents is performing badly and identify what they call, “the parenting gap.” The parenting gap refers to the gap between good parenting and poor parenting. Research consistently supports the idea that there is a gap between good and poor parenting.

Good Parenting

What are the characteristics of good parents? Environmental context has a great deal to do with good parenting. Parents who have some college education tend to be in the average or good category (Reeves & Howard, 2013). This stands to reason, since parents who have some college education or a college degree, may have taken a child development course which would influence their parenting. In addition, those parents who have a college degree are more likely to have a better paying job and, therefore, a higher income level, allowing them to provide a better life and more social mobility for their children. Income level not only provides greater opportunity to purchase tangible items, but it also provides parents with the ability to provide a greater variety of experiences for their children. Parents who achieve a higher income also have more leisure time which allows them to take their children to museums, movies, public libraries, and on vacations.

Parents who are scraping out an existence at minimum wage jobs often do not have the time or energy to provide these experiences for their children. In addition, parents whose focus is on day-to-day existence often do not have the

time or energy to spend time reading a story or having thought-provoking conversations with their children. The message that their children receive is that reading, and therefore school, are not important.

When parents value education, so do children. This valuing of education begins in preschool and continues throughout life. It supports the idea that early childhood education has a huge impact on and value to society.

Bridging the Parenting Gap

The Perry Preschool Project, begun in 1962, is a long-term study that looked at preschool children from an underserved community in Ypsilanti, Michigan. The findings of this study show that children who attend quality early childhood education programs have a distinct advantage over those who do not. The children involved in the Perry Preschool Project were more likely to graduate from high school, more likely to be gainfully employed, more likely to maintain their marriages, more likely to be productive members of society, less likely to end up on welfare, and less likely to be incarcerated or to be a burden on society (Schweinhart & others, 1993). For every dollar spent on early childhood education, society gains seven dollars by not paying for social services.

Head Start was begun in 1965 in order to bridge the parenting gap. Like many programs of its time, it was meant to provide the experiences and education for disadvantaged children. In addition to educational goals, Head Start

maintains a strong parent education program, including home visits. Head Start requires parents to be involved in the educational program of their children. The home visits are designed to bring the school curriculum into the home. Head Start is one of the few social programs started in the 1960s that has survived budget cuts by the federal government.

There are questions, however, regarding the effectiveness of home visits. Most home visits have shown disappointing results (Brooks-Gunn and Markman, 2005) due to the fact that most are not intense enough, nor are the home visitors well enough trained or supervised. As a result, only a few home visit programs have had a significant impact on children's school readiness. Head Start appears to be one of those few exceptions.

What the research appears to be telling us is that while parenting in the United States is related to gaps in income, education, opportunity, and a lack of good parenting models, it is the quality of parenting that impacts the lives of children. Like early childhood education, quality becomes the key factor in parenting. Poor quality parenting, like poor quality early childhood education, puts children at a disadvantage which just might impact them throughout life. The focus of our partnerships with parents must then be not just on providing appropriate parent education, but ensuring that whatever we do in the area of parent education is of the highest quality.

What's More Important

With these results in mind, as Lutheran church professionals, we must go beyond early childhood and parent education and consider the spiritual education of children and families. The faith development of young children is infinitely more important than anything else we might provide for children and families. As we consider the spiritual needs of children and families, we must apply what we know about parent education to the spiritual life of children. This raises the question; could there also be a gap in parenting when it comes to the spiritual life of children? Is it possible that when it comes to spiritual development, there is a gap between good spiritual parenting and



poor spiritual parenting? In other words, is there a difference in the quality of spiritual parenting between those parents who have a stronger spiritual background themselves and those who lack their own faith development? In responding to these questions, consider the following spiritual parenting styles.

Three Parenting Styles

Sit in the church pew on any Sunday morning and watch how families worship. What do you observe? You will, no doubt, see a variety of spiritual parenting styles within the context of any service. Family A enters the church, sits together, and worships together. The parents appear to be familiar with the liturgy and culture of the service. The children sit next to parents or older siblings who help them during the service. The parents help the children to follow along in the service folder or hymnal by pointing to the words being said or the songs being sung. The parents model folding hands, bowing heads, and closing eyes during prayer and encourage children to do the same. Even very young children are encouraged to whisper during the service when they have questions. There is no eating, or drawing, or roaming the pew in this family, not because it is not allowed, but because the children and parents are involved in the worship service and these distractions are not needed. It is obvious that the Sunday worship has significant meaning for both parents and children, and that it is given

priority in the life of the family. If we could see into the home of this family, we would see that this family prays before and after meals, at the beginning and end, as well as throughout the day. We would see a family where Christ truly is the center of the home and where faith development and a spiritual life are important and integral parts of their family life. Parental values are based on Scripture and the values of the faith community. Those values are clearly communicated to the children, and the family's lifestyle reflects those values. The children are taught to respect God's house, and, yet have a joy, a passion for being there. This is done not only through parental modeling, but also through intentional teaching.

Now, let's observe Family B. Family B enters the church and sits together. Often Mom and Dad sit next to each other and the children sit together. This is significant because, while the parents may model appropriate church behavior and respect, the child farthest from the parents is too far away from the parents to benefit from that model. While the children may appear to be worshipping, they are, in fact, occupied with other distractions. They are the children who are busy eating Cheerios. These children are busy drawing pictures, and most likely talking and playing with each other during the service. The parents re-focus the children when they become a bit too loud or disruptive. The children are expected to follow along during the service and to participate where they are able, but they are to do it on their own. This family is in church together, but they are not worshipping together. This family is faithful in their worship habits. They are in church every Sunday without fail, and there is no doubt that their faith is important and forms their values and lifestyle. At home this family prays when they remember to do so, they do have conversations about their spiritual life, and the parents do have strong concern for the spiritual education of their children. The parents do share their faith and values with their children. However, unlike Family A, the spiritual education the parents provide for their children is more accidental than intentional. Spiritual parenting is present, but it is inconsistent.

Family C provides a third style of spiritual parenting that can be observed. This family enters the church building with Starbucks in hand. They are either extremely hesitant about where to sit, or they provide quite a commotion as they find a place to sit and get settled. On the way to finding a place to sit, one or two of the children see friends and go to sit with their friends. This family is not even physically sitting together, which means that they are not worshipping as a family. As the service progresses, the parents struggle to follow along and are helpless to provide a model for the children who have chosen to remain with them. There is no modeling of church behaviors by these parents. The children have come to church with a variety of activities which will keep them busy during the service. The children put their feet on the pews, lie down and spread out on the pew, and show little or no respect for the fact that they are in God's house. They could easily be in a movie theater, and their behavior would be the same. There is very little spiritual education evident in this family. The parents are not familiar with the worship service, so they are not able to model it or assist their children in following the service. Their expectations are simply that the children behave in church. If we could look into the home life of this family, we would see that there is little spiritual education going on in the home. This family most likely prays only at holidays and extended family dinners. They attend church on major holidays. These parents may not have attended much themselves until they became affiliated with the church for the first time when they brought their children to be baptized. They did this because it was the right thing to do. Their next contact with the church was when they decided to enroll their first child in the church's early childhood center. Now they attend church only when the children are involved in some way.

Closing the Spiritual Parenting Gap

These are families we all know and deal with every day in our ministries. Is there a gap in terms of the spiritual parenting of children? When one looks at these three examples, it

becomes obvious that there is, indeed, a parenting gap in the spiritual lives of children. We could agree that Family A seems to be aware of the huge responsibility of parents in the spiritual education of their children. We might even say that the parents in Family B are doing an acceptable job when it comes to spiritual parenting, but that they need some support along the way. It is obvious, however, that the parents in Family C need a great deal of attention and support when it comes to spiritual parenting. There is, indeed, a gap in spiritual parenting. In terms of faith development, we could label parents as strong, average, and weak.

Why does this situation exist? Who is to blame? In many cases, it is not the parents that are to blame. It is difficult to teach your children what you have never learned. Many young parents today are the products of parents who were born in the 1970s when everything established was being questioned. Along with rules and traditions, structures like religion were ignored and discredited. As the children of the 1970s who had turned their backs on the established church and then became parents, they had no religious background or traditions that they could pass on to their own children.

The children of those '70s parents became parents themselves, but they were now two generations away from church and any types of spiritual values and/or education. So the blame for the average and/or weak spiritual parenting in today's society may not rest with parents who were never taught themselves. While faith itself is created by the Holy Spirit, the values, traditions, and rituals that bring comfort in their familiarity are passed on from generation to generation. When a generation does not have the benefit of that intergenerational education, they can hardly be expected to pass it on to their children.

Laying blame, however, does not accomplish the goal of closing the spiritual education gap. What needs to be done is to support all families, and the church is in the best position to provide that support. The church has the ability to close the spiritual parenting gap by offering parent education programs that focus not just on quality parenting, but also on quality spiritual parenting. The goal here is to improve parenting skills, not to add members to the congregation. As we welcome families to events and conversation, we will have many opportunities to live out the Gospel message with these families.



Many congregations provide intentional means of closing the spiritual parenting gap. Most early childhood centers provide some parent education as a part of the program. These range from parent nights at which parents experience what their children do at school to expert speakers and parenting classes. While these can be successful programs in some ways, we must go beyond what most early childhood centers offer in order to close the spiritual parenting gap. We must become partners with parents for the spiritual growth and welfare of their children. As we do this, we must also remember that it is the parents who are the parents and who have the most influence in the lives of their children. It is vital that we remain a support for both parents and children, and never intrude upon the parental role.

Family events that mix the strong, average, and weak parents are the most beneficial. Events at which families join together in games, meals, and other events provide opportunities for families to learn from each other. As parents socialize with each other, they observe and learn additional ways of parenting. Conversations turn to children and their behaviors. Parents share common joys, expectations, and

frustrations. Out of those conversations also come solutions to parenting issues. As Vygotsky would say, they are moving through their zone of proximal development (Mooney, 2013). We provide the venue, and allow the Holy Spirit to guide the conversation and the results.

Congregations that see the spiritual education of the children as a congregational responsibility tend to develop relationships with families that impact faith development. Programs such as the Family Friendly Partners Network whose central office is located on the campus of Concordia University, Ann Arbor, help congregations to see that healthy families who are strong in the spiritual education of their children can have an impact on the world (Freudenberg & Lawrence, 1998).

While it is vital that we work to close Reeves' and Howard's (2013) parenting gap, it is eternally vital that we assist parents in closing the spiritual parenting gap. In doing so, not only is the spiritual development of children strengthened, but it also affects the spiritual development of the parents. The result is families whose lives are centered in Jesus Christ and who are not just attending church together, but who are living their faith together.

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book reviews

**Implications of Brain Research
for the Church: What It Means for
Theology and Ministry.
Allen Nauss. Minneapolis:
Kirk House Publishers, 2013.**

A long time ago in a faraway place, God created man and woman and placed them in the Garden of Eden. God gave Adam and Eve every perfect gift, but alas, you know the rest of the story. Adam and Eve, in a vain and selfish attempt to be more like God, sinned and ruined all that was perfect.

When we think about the results of the ruin of perfection recorded in the Genesis account, we obviously discuss sin. We also frequently harken to examples such as predatory animals, noxious plants, and natural disasters where what once was perfect now causes sometimes catastrophic pain and suffering for humankind.

In his book, *Implications of Brain Research for the Church: What it Means for Theology and Ministry*, Allen Nauss brings the tools of theological analysis to one of God's greatest gifts to mankind, but one that is also polluted by sin, the human brain. One may wonder why this has not been done earlier. The answer has two parts. The first relates to developments in neurobiology over the past twenty years. These developments have finally allowed us to analyze the workings of the living brain. Prior to the existence of modern imaging and analytical technologies and the research that has accompanied them, researchers were limited to studying only the surface of the living brain or to the study of dead brains and their cells. Now, we are blessed with technologies and strategies that allow us to see the brain in action and to explore its intricate networks.

The second part of the answer relates to the character of the brain itself. Obviously a gift and blessing from God, the brain has developed an array of psychological and neurobiological defenses that pretty much allows it to see what it wants to see and call it "reality." It is this reality-defining function of the brain that has allowed it to go unanalyzed for so long. The brain sees what it wants to see and constructs a reality narrative to support the perceptions of itself that it has chosen. This book explores many of those complex functions that, in the end, result in our understanding of reality, in this case a reality that includes the proclamation of God's Good News to all of those other brains out there, each with its own reality-defining function.

Nauss does a particularly good job in at least two areas. Most people, even those with only slight interest in the concepts of psychology, are familiar with the terms "left-brain" and "right-brain," known to psychologists as lateralization. Nauss explores the concepts and research related to lateralization and makes meaningful application to a variety of challenges in theology and ministry. Our notorious resistance to change can be related to the left hemisphere's demonstrated preference for familiarity. Even major challenges to the church such as some of our historic doctrinal controversies are demonstrated to have a relationship to the lateralization of the human brain. Nauss offers no excuses and assigns no blame. He simply describes the research-based understanding of how the brain works and offers reasonable connections to important concepts.

Probably the most interesting topic discussed in the book is related to the construction of meaning. Nauss' concepts related to the construction of meaning seem to be very close to what educators identify as "transfer of learning." His description and explanation of the sermon, prayer, personal ministry and, in fact, the entire worship experience as an exercise in the construction of meaning, are useful and practical. It is one of the best, dare I say most "meaningful" parts of the book.

Nauss has done a thorough, sometimes exhaustive job, of reviewing recent brain research and bringing it into an intersection with theology and ministry as understood by the Christian church at large, and in particular by The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. If you have no real interest in brain physiology, certain parts of this text will seem a little drawn out. However, the detail gives the work credibility. You can breeze through those parts to get to the parts where Nauss addresses important issues from an entirely new perspective. It is an exercise in attention, perception and construction of meaning that is well worth the time of anyone who has responsibility for public proclamation of the Gospel.

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**The Christian Parenting
Handbook. Dr. Scott Turansky
and Joanne Miller, R.N.
Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013.**

Parenting books are a dime a dozen. Google "parenting experts" and you'll find 114,000,000 choices. Please, be discriminating as you read any self-help book. Just because someone says that he or she is an expert doesn't mean one is. And even experts have been known to give less than stellar advice.

When I see a book written by a Dr. and an R.N., this suggests to me that these are medical professionals. However, Scott's doctorate is in organizational management and strategic planning. That seems just a bit deceptive to me and makes me doubt his expert status as a parenting guru. (For more information about Turansky and Miller, check out their websites: biblicalparenting.org and takejesushome.com)

Turansky and Miller are co-founders of Biblical Parenting University. Their four major tenants are:

Be Practical – Parents are the primary source for teaching children how to handle life;

Focus on the Heart – The heart is the source of lasting growth. Ultimately God is the one who changes hearts;

Be Biblical – God's word has strategies for the issues that families face;

Look for Adult Solutions to Children's Problems – Give children tools for life that will last into adulthood.

I agree, in theory, with all of the above tenants. Much of the advice in the book is sound, and yet, I am disturbed by the undertone expressed in some of the examples, such as: a behavior situation

is given; a parent disciplines; discipline is followed by a lecture that uses the word “we’re,” as in “Remember, we’re working on self-control ...” It seems like a little thing, but that use of the word “we’re” grates on my last nerve. This little lecture technique at the end of a punishment belittles the child’s intelligence.

Definitions of words are important. The authors encourage the reader to create a personal understanding of words, and then they set out to define words for us. They are clear that punishment and discipline are two very different things, and then they choose to include consequences in their definitions of punishment. For me, consequences are the result of actions taken. Consequences can be bad, or they can be good! If I make a good decision, the odds are that the result of that decision – the consequence – will be good.

The biggest problem I have with the book is the lack of Baptismal grace. There is no discussion of confession and absolution, assuring your child that she or he is forgiven, blessing your children, teaching your child who he or she is through one’s Baptism. Maybe that’s just for Lutherans. These authors have no sense of the power of Baptism to change one’s life. It’s not in their religious background.

Maybe Lutheran Christians can use almost any parenting advice as long as they are learning to live as God’s baptized people, practicing with their children day by day to live their faith, remembering who they are because of Christ, and living their calling to be God’s chosen people.

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Passing the Torch: Sharing Faith & Values with the Millennial Generation. Tom Couser. Denver: Outskirts Press, 2013.

It has been a blessing to me to work as a Director of Christian Education for the last eleven years. For many of those years I was called to work with youth and young adults. I loved youth group trips and the long hours getting to know youth as we drove or flew to our destinations, praying with them when they faced struggles, and celebrating their milestones and other victories. So many good times are stored up in my memory bank that I will treasure for the rest of my life. On the other hand, working with youth sometimes involves getting to hear negative things about youth—such as their dress, their perceived lack of ambition or politeness, and their inadequate communication skills. It makes me sad to see that some think so little of our young people. That isn’t my experience with today’s youth.

I was so encouraged to read *Passing the Torch: Sharing Faith & Values with the Millennial Generation* by Tom Couser. Couser has written a book for an older generation who is seeking guidance on how they can share their faith and values with the millennial generation. This book will do just that. It will help guide them on the path of reaching out to youth and young adults. The author gives practical advice on moving out of one’s comfort zone and intentionally engaging in meaningful

conversations. Such conversations will one day open the door to being able to share one’s faith and perhaps even leave a legacy in the life of a young person. I can’t imagine a greater calling for a follower of Jesus Christ.

Passing the Torch wasn’t written for the church worker; after all, we are doing our best to encourage youth and others in the faith walk. Rather, Couser developed this resource to help an older generation see that they can be a part of making a difference in the lives of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and yes, even that troubled youth in their church or down the street. Couser’s perspectives can help older generations see that they have something very valuable to share with young people while giving them tips on how they can do just that. This book made me look into my own life and see how very blessed I have been to be part of congregations in which people took time to invest in me. Now as a mom of two little ones, I want the same for them. I want them to have a whole “family” that they can look to who will help shape them into amazing adults.

I hope that many will read this book and realize that “the time is now” for us to reach out to youth and young adults and make an impact.

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